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September/October 2004

Risk

You would think that architecture would be an attractive career path for risk-takers. After all, there's the creative aspect of the field — and we all know that creativity is nearly synonymous with risk. And then there's the fact that many architects start their own practices, entrepreneurship being perhaps the most socially acceptable outlet for risk-takers.

Risk is a question to which success or failure are the only answers. The potential rewards of success provide the motivation to flirt with failure.

Architects flirt with failure every day: What if that window detail leaks, if someone slips on that floor, if that crawl space becomes a mold factory? Liability — with its attendant threat of financial loss — hangs heavily over their heads. But a dry, safe, healthful building does not bring its designer a financial windfall. A dry, safe, healthful building is considered merely a baseline for professional competence.

What then constitutes architectural success? And how are the attendant rewards measured? Michael Buckley FAIA has suggested that reward in the form of enhanced reputations and peer recognition is accepted — and presumably adequate — compensation [*ArchitectureBoston*, Summer 2002]. A look at recent successful design risks indicates that he may be right: the building owners reap financial rewards, and the architects become celebrities. The culture of architecture — with its roots in 19th-century professional standards of "fiduciary trust," "public welfare," and "common good" — may well represent lofty, worthy values that disdain craven fascination with money. But let's face it: the currency of American society is currency.

Reward is proportional to perceived risk, and in our society, creative or intellectual risk is not rated as highly as commercial risk. And so architects find themselves in the same dilemma as all those who toil in the creative economy under the glam occupational category "content provider." To be a content provider in the Information Age is to be a factory worker in the Industrial Age. Someone else — someone willing to gamble on commercial failure — will reap the spoils.

For far too long, architects have whined that if only they could "educate the public," the public would value their services and reward them more lavishly. Maybe it's time for another tactic. The AIA could launch a new ad campaign highlighting the hazards of building. None of this "let an architect help you build your dream house" fade-to-sepia cheerfulness. Pull out all the stops, with big photos of *Aspergillus* mold, roof collapses, electrical fires, and basement floods. If construction is seen as a risky proposition, perhaps a dry, safe, healthful building will be seen as a minor miracle worthy of reward.

But there is yet another tactic. Those who covet greater reward should assess their real appetite for risk, and then take advantage of their creative skills to recraft the way they practice architecture. Some architects who have done just that appear in this issue. Others will appear in our next issue, which inaugurates *ArchitectureBoston*'s redesign. Even magazines sometimes need to take risks.

Elizabeth S. Padjen FAIA
Editor

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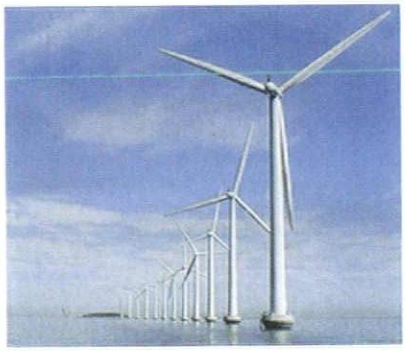
Lia D'Amico
Edit

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Letters

Thank you for your article on the opposing views of the proposed wind farm in Nantucket Sound ["Two Views," May/June 2004]. As I have watched this debate evolve over the past year, I am increasingly struck by the unwillingness of the wind farm opponents to recognize any of even the most obvious merits of the project and instead to make ridiculous analogies to the skylines of Los Angeles and Buenos Aires.

As the oil producing regions of the Middle East slip deeper into chaos, this project and others like it represent our future. We must learn to appreciate the design of green technology and work to ensure that the implementation of these proposals is scaled and



sited sensitively, even aesthetically, and then the wind farm may, in fact, become a Cape Cod tourist attraction after all — a large-scale environmental installation that expresses the movement of the winds as it provides jobs and energy independence.

In this context, the opponents' use of the Statue of Liberty as a negative "comp" to a windmill tower is ironic.

As architects, let's all remember that the appreciation of the beauty of the built environment is often acquired over time as new technologies become incorporated into our way of life. The Zakim Bridge stands as a glorious testament to how beautiful an interstate can be. Perhaps the Cape Cod wind farm can be similarly powerful.

David J. Hacin AIA
Hacin + Associates
Boston

As an architect in public service, I found the "Politically Speaking" roundtable [July/August 2004] to be right on target. By framing our professional efficacy as a function of personal mission, professional skill, and political insight, the panelists brought forward critical points, particularly for those of us who do not acknowledge how politics can often affect our work more than budgets or programs ever do. The roundtable's frank exchange about architectural education pointed out one of the first hurdles to effective preparation in the political environment. Several professional schools were once known for advancing architecture as a means to fulfill the social contract, whereas other programs were distinguished for their aesthetic instruction while, perhaps, seeming agnostic about architecture's role toward social transformation. To this day, professional instruction continues to struggle in merging these perspectives. What message are we sending pre-professionals when it appears that the skill set to generate beautiful form and space comes at the expense of understanding why we practice architecture to begin with? Imagine how much better prepared we would be to demonstrate the value of design services if our educational programs could blend these pedagogical viewpoints coherently.

In politics and design, experience remains the best teacher and not just for designers. National and regional programs, such as the Mayors' Institute on City Design, assist elected officials in their roles as "chief planners" of American cities and pull heavily on architects to help make the case. The AIA R/UDAT (Regional/Urban Design Assistance Teams) program has brought designers to citizens through public processes for decades, leaving communities across the nation better versed in the political give-and-take of community-based design initiatives. And many academic programs have set up urban design studios to assist communities and local governments.

Architects are uniquely trained in the creative synthesis of solutions, but we can also be better players in the policy-making

arena of the built environment. Fortunately, many professional activists of the '60s and '70s have now become activist-professionals at a time when terms like "smart growth" and "livability" are part of the political lexicon. The attitude we assume toward politics can go a long way in determining our professional contribution at this propitious moment if, as David Dixon so eloquently stated, "we learn to appreciate it, to enjoy it, and to be nurtured and inspired by it."

William Gilchrist, Director
Department of Planning, Engineering & Permits
City of Birmingham, Alabama

Perhaps politics has gotten a bad rap because some of its practitioners have a tendency to put their hands in the till or vote according to the needs of their contributors. However, a good politician is as skillful as a good artist. Politics is the art of the possible, and politics in its best sense is the art of reconciling conflicting positions. If politicians are skillful, then it is not a zero sum game. But — and here is where architects have such a useful role to play — a skillful politician is one who brings a fresh approach, thinks outside the box, and can produce a new concept which satisfies disparate views.

For instance, if a building is too tall, a good architect can suggest techniques to break the mass into elements that look smaller, or put some of the mass below grade, or export mechanical systems to an adjacent parcel, or double-stack the garage parking. In fact, it's the same skill required of a good lawyer: that is, to seek the common ground. In the process, the politically astute will identify areas of disagreement and avoid them, and identify areas of agreement and enhance them. A good politician possesses these skills as does a good architect.

These days, every project needs permits and approvals. No longer can anything be built "as of right." Architects must design projects not only for the owner and his or her needs, but also for approval by permitting agencies. In this sense, he or she must be "politic" and must be engaged with and aware of the abutters and the opponents and propose a design which navigates skillfully between conflicting positions and gives the permitting agencies ample ground for compromise and approval. Politics is an art form which we must admire and master whether we are architects or lawyers.

Robert Tuchmann
Wilmer Cutler Pickering Hale and Dorr LLP
Boston

This is an exciting time for smart growth, with action taking place in 27 states, and Massachusetts is in the forefront of much of the national activity. Doug Foy stated ["Smart Talk on Smart Growth," July/August 2004] that "the governor has put the full weight of his office behind the effort...." I find that the states accomplishing the most are those in which the governor is pushing the agencies to work together.

As I read his comments, I was reminded very strongly that land use is not for the faint of heart. After our smart-growth legislation passed in Maryland, I can recall my own Board of Regents proposing that a campus be built on a dairy farm instead of in a downtown. Fortunately, at budget time, they saw the light.

Doug Foy recognizes the interconnectivity of all aspects of state and local government with smart growth. He is correct about the connection between land use and transportation. This connection must be made before we can change the way we grow.

Doug is also correct that "the federal government doesn't really pay attention to any of this stuff on the ground." The problem is, however, that federal policy continues to subsidize sprawl. Efforts for growth management at the state and local level would be better served if the federal government reinforced them instead of undermining them. An obvious example is the continued imbalance of road construction over mass transportation funding.

To be successful with smart growth, there must be extensive changes of laws, regulations, budgets, and policies at the federal, state, and local levels. No one level of government can stop sprawl by itself. All three levels supported and subsidized sprawl over the last 60 years. Now, we must work together if we are to undo that damage.

Parris N. Glendening
President
Smart Growth Leadership Institute
(Former Governor, State of Maryland)

In the mid 1950s, the Boston Chamber of Commerce, along with the Vault (a small group of influential city leaders), became concerned that development had ceased and that the city was in dire need of revitalization. As a first step, a map of the city was prepared by the Planning Board calling for the demolition of major portions of the South End, Charlestown, the West End, and a dozen or so smaller sites in the Financial District and Roxbury. The West End, a cohesive, working-class precinct, was selected as the first blighted area to go. Eviction notices were posted, forcing out the 7,500 Jewish and Italian tenants. Because lenders had so little confidence in Boston's future, however, only one upper-income apartment building was completed at a time. What had once been a vibrant neighborhood became for a while the parking lot for Massachusetts General Hospital.

Mercifully, the West End was the only neighborhood to fall victim to the wrecker's ball. The legacy of this pulverized precinct is especially noteworthy, because it successfully stifled the cry for further clearance and prompted the citizenry to demand a key role in decision making around development within their own bailiwicks.

In the early 1960s, generous amounts of federal urban renewal dollars became available to cities throughout the country. The newly created Boston Redevelopment Authority established 10 urban renewal districts, each of which elected residents to serve on project area committees that functioned as advisory boards to the BRA. Demolition was restricted dramatically and the era of active participation by citizens in the future of their communities had begun in earnest. Twenty years later, the Boston Civic Design Commission was established to provide public forums twice monthly so that residents might participate in the review of proposed projects within their neighborhoods.

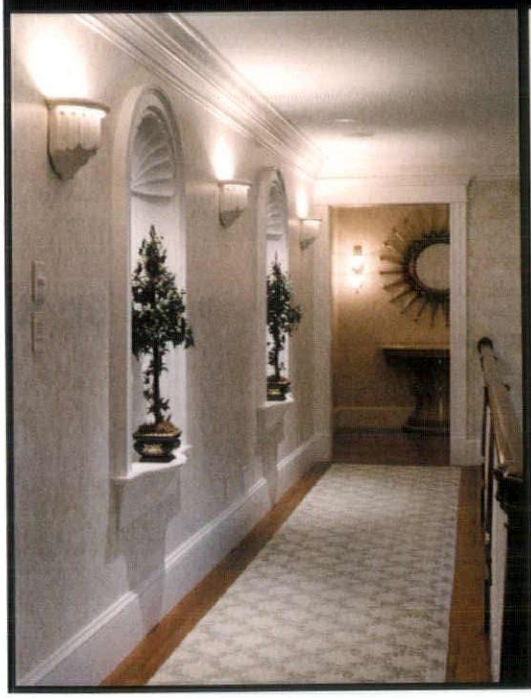
To paraphrase an old military adage, city planning, design, and construction projects are far too important to be left to urban specialists, architects, and real estate developers. Boston's architecture over the past 30 years has been the product of exceptional talent and thoughtful public review procedures that provide a seat at the table for all those who wish to voice their opinions. This is passionate politics at its finest, and Boston is all the richer for it.

Homer Russell
Urban Design Director Emeritus
Boston Redevelopment Authority
Boston

We want to hear from you. Letters may be e-mailed to epadjen@architects.org or sent to *ArchitectureBoston*, 52 Broad St., Boston, MA 02109.

Letters may be edited for clarity and length and must include your name, address, and daytime telephone number. Length should not exceed 300 words.

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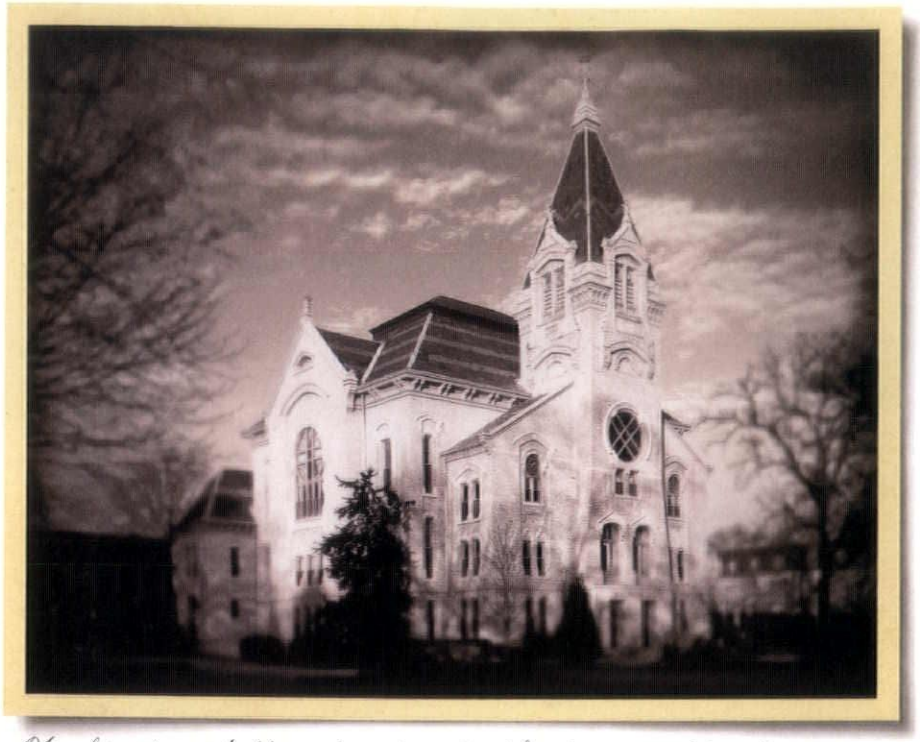


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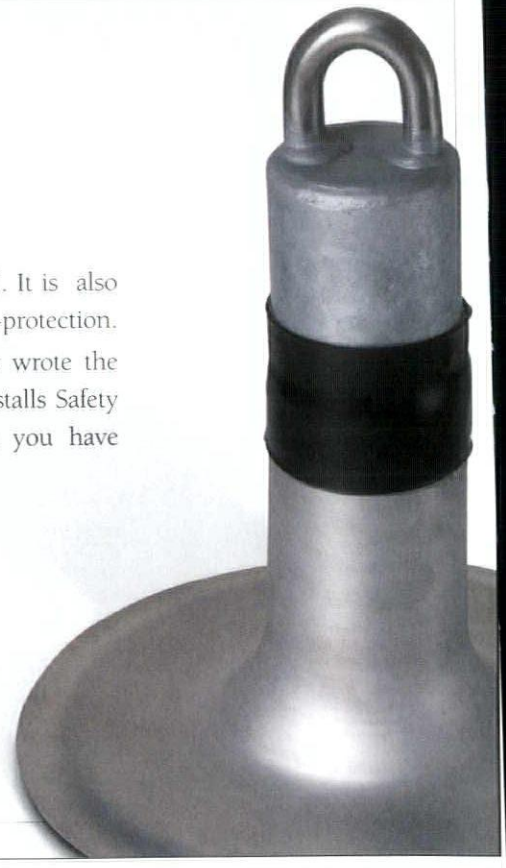
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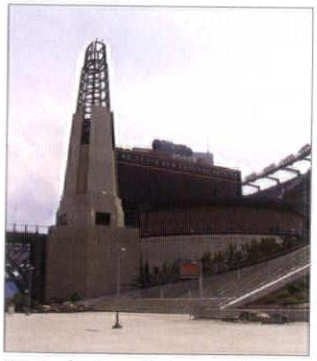
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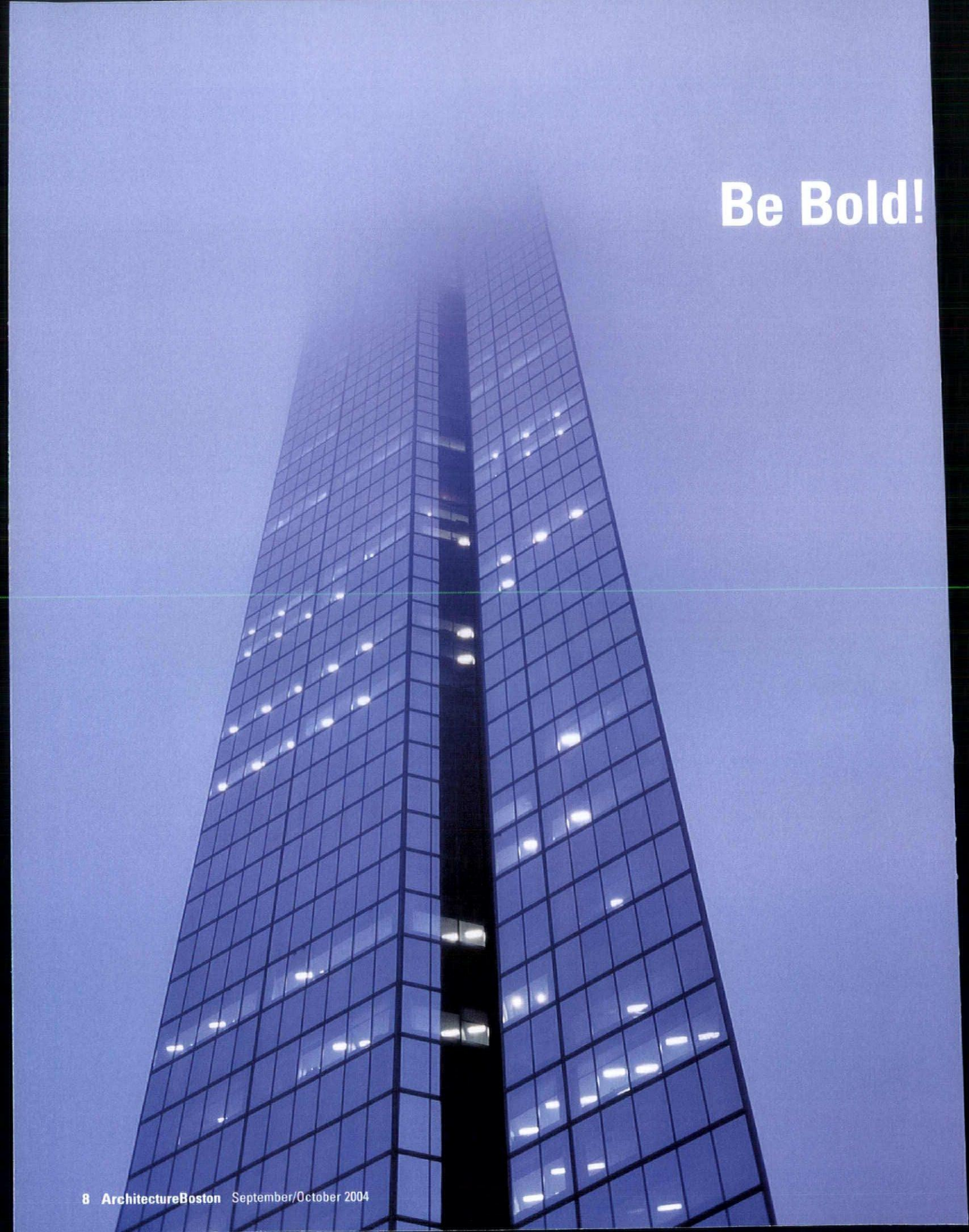


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Be Bold!

Be Not Too Bold!

The risky business of real estate development

Participants:

Roger Cassin is the managing partner of Winn Development Company in Boston, developers of the proposed Columbus Center project in Boston's South End and Clippership Wharf in East Boston. A 30-year veteran of the development industry, he was previously a practicing architect.

Ronald Druker is president of The Druker Company in Boston, developers of Atelier | 505 in Boston's South End, the Heritage on the Garden in the Back Bay, the Colonnade Hotel, the Colonnade Residences, and other mixed-use projects. He was a Loeb Fellow and a faculty member at the Harvard Graduate School of Design.

David Hatem is an attorney with Donovan Hatem in Boston, representing architects, engineers, and professional liability underwriters.

Peter Madsen FAIA is the principal of Edo Essex Properties in Boston. He was previously the managing director of Pembroke Real Estate, president of The Gunwyn Company, and managing principal of Graham Gund Architects.

Elizabeth Padjen FAIA is the editor of *ArchitectureBoston*.

Robert Silverman is the chief financial officer at Emerson College in Boston, where he has directed the relocation of the college campus from the Back Bay to the Theater District.

Elizabeth Padjen: Risk is one of those rare words that is both positive and negative. We tend to associate people who are risk-takers with positive values, such as leadership, enterprise, and energy. But risk comes with an implication of failure, too. Owners and developers are on the leading edge of risk-taking. Is it in the genes? Would you call yourselves risk-takers?

Ronald Druker: Clearly, if you're a developer, you're a risk taker; if you're not a risk taker, then you're not a developer. We take risk with every project we do. Until the project is complete, it's fraught with risk. It's a question of how well we're able to mitigate that risk.

Roger Cassin: What's important is the risk/reward ratio. Every developer likes to think he's not at risk. His job is to measure and to mitigate the risk. For instance, I don't buy lottery tickets; for me, the risk is too great. But it's OK to take the big gambles when I feel that I've got some level of control.

Ronald Druker: Yes, I think you'll find that most developers don't have their money in the stock market because they can't control it.

When I began working in development in the late '60s, the business wasn't as risky because there was no such thing as a speculative office building. When an office building was financed, it was generally financed with the tenant. Sixty State Street was one of the first speculative office buildings in the Boston market, and it was almost a huge disaster. It almost became a hotel, almost became an apartment building. The mortgagee was paying the ground rent, but they took the risk and it turned out to be a good building.

Peter Madsen: In venture capital, people say maybe one deal in 10 is going to work. In real estate, every deal has to work. Some projects may be weaker than others in a portfolio, but you really can't ever let yourself believe you can take the risk that something will be a colossal failure.

JAMES MARSHALL/COMBO

In venture capital, people say maybe one deal in ten is going to work. In real estate, every deal has to work. — *Peter Madsen FAIA*

Ronald Druker: Or it needs to be within your failure parameter — I can do this, it can fail, and I'll be OK. If you commit to risk that's greater than you can afford, then you have a real problem. In the late '80s, you had people who should never have been given the money that they were able to borrow, and they weren't able to pay it back when all the bad things happened.

Elizabeth Padjen: In our economy, institutions are also significant players in the development game. How are they different? What is the role of risk from an institutional point of view?

Robert Silverman: There's an intrinsic conflict because institutions, certainly institutions of higher education, are inherently risk-averse. And real estate is all about risk. So in my line of work, which is at the intersection of higher education and real estate, you have to balance those two things. You can't eliminate risk. The approach I've always taken is to make sure that the institution understands what the risk actually is. Then it's just a question of whether the risk is worth the reward.

The most recent instance for me has been the relocation of Emerson from the Back Bay to the Theater District. If you understood Emerson's circumstances 10 years ago — in terms of finances and facilities — you would see that it was in fact a prudent risk, one that happened to work out. I think "prudence" is a word that must always accompany risk in an institutional setting.

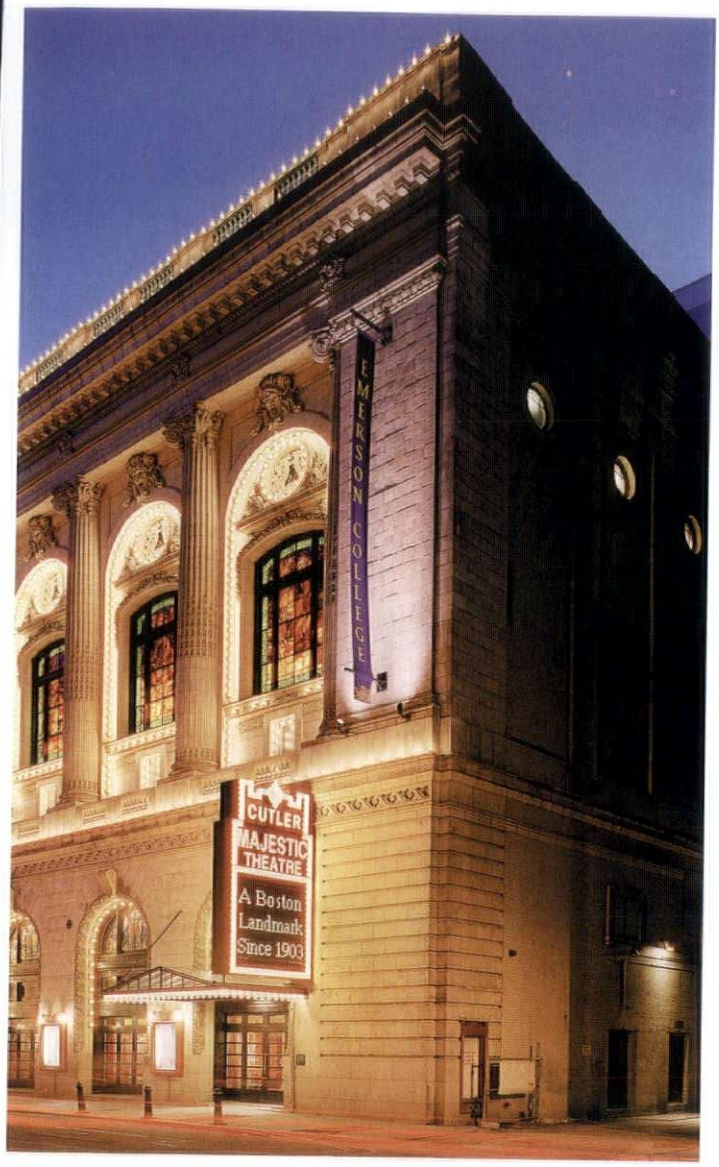
David Hatem: It used to be that you could look at risk in the context of some basic principles: for example, that the degree of risk assumption should bear some correlation to the extent to which you are going to manage the risk. And you should accept only that risk which is within your ability to control. Looking at projects from the standpoint of architects or engineers, or those who insure them, that model really doesn't work in today's environment. If you're an architect or an engineer, you're certainly going to think about your risk: Is this project right for us? Do we have the qualifications? Do we have the experience? Do we have adequate staff? Is the chemistry right with the client? Are the contract terms acceptable? All of those things are within your control, and you can walk if they don't feel right. Those are what I call the internal risk factors.

Now we are seeing that external risk factors are increasingly important. You begin to look outside the design firm and at the owners. How are they capitalized? How are they funded? What's the funding source? What's the stability of funding? Who are the other stakeholders? What's the accountability to the public and other stakeholders? Do they have sufficient expertise to manage this project? Is their schedule and budget realistic? If any one of those things isn't present on the owner's side, there's a dramatic impact in increasing the risk exposure for the design professional on that project. And when you go down that list, the design professional has no ability to influence, much less control, those risk variables.

Ronald Druker: The external forces are a new risk factor that heretofore weren't part of the equation. Today, whether you're an architect assessing the viability of your client and your own ability to deliver a product or a developer looking at a market or trying to understand the economy, there's a new factor that we first encountered on 9/11. What happened then really forces me to consider the possibility of another occurrence — and there will be one — and where I will be in a cycle, which will have a serious impact on the way I move forward.

We were very lucky with Atelier | 505, which was supposed to have started on 9/18. Talk about risk! We had nearly $10 million out of pocket on 9/11, ready to move forward — working drawings, financing in place (although not signed), 5,000 brochures at $30 each in our office, computers and sales space ready. And we stopped the project dead in its tracks. The decision I made at the time, not knowing what the future was going to be, was that I would rather lose what I had already put into it, or sell the project to the next greater fool for more or less than I had into it, than risk even more. As it turned out, we started nine months later and it worked out fine. And miraculously, there's not been another major incident within the United States. But that's a risk factor that none of us can really assess, and it will certainly have an impact on the way we'll do business in the future.

Roger Cassin: While 9/11 was off the chart in terms of anything any of us could have anticipated as a risk concern, generally speaking, real estate has always been terrific because it works if it's well-conceived. But there's also a risk that we haven't talked about, and that is the intrinsic risk associated with vision. For example, you might have the vision to address a new market in housing and decide to go for ultra-luxury $1,500-a-foot units. There's a risk you might fail, but some holder in due course will succeed, and after you sell those $1,500 units for $900 a foot, the second and third owners are going to be very thankful. There's another kind of risk associated with vision — it's the "if you build it, they will



Cutler Majestic Theatre at Emerson College, Emerson College
Architect (original building): John Galen Howard
Architect (renovation): Elkus / Manfredi Architects Ltd.

come" syndrome. Your vision can fail and no one will show up. That's a whole different kind of risk.

Elizabeth Padjen: Ron mentioned 60 State Street as a building that was risky in its time. What other projects, either past or present, do you consider to be risky buildings?

Ronald Druker: Faneuil Hall Marketplace, which was arguably the watershed development event of the 20th century in Boston, and perhaps even in the country, because it spawned other similar developments. It also reinforced retail in downtowns. But the history of that development was extraordinary, from Kevin White to Tad Stahl to Jim Rouse to Ben Thompson, and the pleading they had to do to get banks from outside Boston to finance it — because Boston banks wouldn't. That was enormously risky.

I think our Atelier | 505 project was certainly risky — 103 condominiums at the corner of Berkeley and Tremont Street in the South End — with the highest price being $3.3 million. I think Roger's deal at Columbus Center has got huge risk.

Roger Cassin: Someone asked me recently to compare our Columbus Center project, where I'm doing the turnpike air rights, to the Millennium Ritz deal. The Millennium deal would have been too risky for me to attempt. With my Columbus Center deal, I've got a confined, blighted area, if you will, between two of the city's best neighborhoods. But when we finish, the blight will be 100 percent gone, and we will have created a whole new district stitching together those neighborhoods. In contrast, the Millennium is on the edge of a difficult area and, although it's improving the situation, it's not fixing it 100 percent.

Robert Silverman: As you know, that's Emerson's new neighborhood. If you're a tuition-driven institution, which Emerson is, people say, "You occupy your own space; you don't have the same kind of risk as a developer." When we started doing this, you could buy a building in that district for $25 a square foot in foreclosure. But there was a huge risk in this sense: we were moving an entire college. Would we lose enrollment because prospective parents and their students wouldn't want to come to what was still, in everybody's mind, the Combat Zone? But today, when somebody asks where Emerson College is located, we say it's between the Four Seasons and the new Ritz.

Peter Madsen: From the outside it looked like a very bold move, and it certainly paved the way for Millennium. You had just populated that area with young people 24/7, which eased a lot of what might have been a worry for that project.

Elizabeth Padjen: What is the relationship of design to what you all do in terms of mitigating risk? How sensitive is risky design to the marketplace, and how do you determine the degree of design risk you're willing to take?

Ronald Druker: It's similar to fashion. You dress appropriately for a particular event. Actually, the Heritage and Atelier | 505 are interesting subjects because each was a competition run by the Boston Redevelopment Authority, although they were financial as well as design competitions. The Heritage location wanted to have a traditional building to form the southern edge of the Public Garden, so we did a building that looked

as though it had been there for 100-some-odd years. In the South End, we were the only one of five teams who did not do an historicist building. We chose to do a building which is more aggressive. We had architects who didn't do historicist work — Machado and Silvetti — and we thought the market was there for an edgy building for people who wanted innovative architecture to be part of their life.

Elizabeth Padjen: So your next project, depending upon the site, could very well be an historicist building.

Ronald Druker: Absolutely. We feel very strongly that architecture is a lot of what our company sells when we develop a project. And I think lenders appreciate that we use good architects. We would like to feel, also, that we influence our architects to do better work or more appropriate work for us. Design is a major part of our risk: it can help mitigate it, but it can also create huge risk — for example, a poorly designed building that can't be maintained, a building that doesn't meet a market, a building that offends the public so that it can't get approved.

Peter Madsen: Developers build to a market. I think I've been lucky that I've always worked in niches where we believed good design was valued by the market. The result is that you get a higher rent or selling price, and in a down market, you get faster absorption. Look at my background. I'm an architect — I come from design, so I believe in it. I don't think good design is risky, and I don't think good design is edgy design. It can be, but good design reaches out to the market, and it's not a risk. It's actually a smart move.

Roger Cassin: There's an interesting nexus between good design and the vision for a project's design, and what actually gets talked about relative to design. Especially in the Boston area, you have to be careful that the permitting process, which involves the community, doesn't derail the project because folks are focused on some catch-word concerns and not on real design. If you're not careful, you can end up with a squat little building because height is everyone's catch-fear. In Columbus Center, for example, where we first proposed a 38-story building, the only thing people wanted to talk about was height. It went down to 29 stories, but thanks to a few architects on the 11-person design review committee, the height went back up to 35 stories because it was better design. Both the developer and the architect have to have a vision and stay the course and try to balance the issues. No one wants to be dead on arrival because he had too much vision.

Peter Madsen: A lot of other worthy issues have substantial community impact, but they don't always get attention that height does.



Atelier | 505 (The Druker Company)
Architect: Machado and Silvetti Associates with ADD Inc

Elizabeth Padjen: Is the public process, then, something that inherently takes the edge off your ability to take risk with design?

Roger Cassin: If you weren't a risk-taker, you wouldn't play the game. But the process is a force that you have to deal with. I've said many times I'd rather let 10 design professionals have at it, than go through a big community process, where you have community politics and municipal politics entering into it, and you get people who are well-intentioned but don't understand what's going on. That's a risk.

Ronald Druker: I think that what happens during the public process is the developer ultimately allows the architecture to

be "dumbed down" to the lowest common denominator in order to get the project through. At the end of the day, the developer can't stand on the principle of simply doing the most appropriate design. You have to do that design within financial parameters that will allow the project to move forward. So I think in many cases, better architecture is possible, but the political risk is far too great.

David Hatem: From the architect or the engineer's point of view, obviously the comfort is greater the more conventional the design is. This suggests that an inverse relationship exists between the degree of design risk and innovation — the more innovative, the greater the risk. That could lead you to conclude that risk is an inhibitor to experimentation. But as everyone else has commented, design innovation can influence the ultimate viability of a project. One thing I've clearly learned is that risk decision-making, whether it's part of a design issue or otherwise, ought not to be viewed in a static context, and that you constrain yourself if you think decisions can't adapt to circumstance. I've been through many situations in which a developer will call upon the architect to think differently — sometimes more creatively, sometimes more conservatively — after a design has faced opposition or reluctance. I've seen the unwillingness to consider innovative approaches because the approach hasn't been time-tested. But I've also seen that when the owner encourages an atmosphere of risk-sharing associated with an innovative approach, you can do fairly remarkable things.

Ronald Druker: How do you share the risk, though, since the client is the one with the deep pockets?

David Hatem: The risk sharing would be that you take into account, for example, the innovative nature of design, in establishing levels of accountability. Truly, if you're the owner, you stand to benefit the most.

Ronald Druker: Or lose the most. I disagree that the design professional can share innovative-design risk appropriately with the developer. The developer can encourage or discourage or accept or reject a proposal from the designer. And in that I guess maybe they're in it together. But at the end of the day, it's the developer's money that is on the line. Even if the developer has a disaster, the architect will go on to the next project if the design was appropriate.

David Hatem: But let's not forget opportunity. All your comments are focused on the adversity. If that innovative design succeeds, you compressed your schedule, you saved money; or your project is no longer in a life-threatening mode; you reap the benefits.

Roger Cassin: It's not coincidence that there are so many architects turned developers. The architect starts out with this underlying belief that good design can overcome almost any obstacle. And maybe having failed or gotten frustrated, he then becomes a developer. But he still carries that with him and believes more in the architects he hires as he goes forward, and is a little more willing to take those risks. But I don't have any partners in the risk from my design team. We, the developers, are taking the risks

Robert Silverman: It also depends on the nature of the client. The developers around the table know that when there's a problem, the most they can do is look to the architect's insurance. But in an institutional setting, it's not unusual for there to be significant cost overruns, and there is an expectation, frankly, that institutions will absorb much of that. Part of that problem, of course, has to do with the way decisions are made in institutions. It's a committee process. So, for example, architects sometimes play off one part of a committee against another to get some particular aspect of the design through. Whereas I suspect in the developers' organizations, a principal in the firm makes a decision and directs everyone to follow it. That's a very different situation.

The other thing I would say that's a little bit different about the institutional situation is that all of you look for sites for development that make sense to you. But institutions are driven by the need for proximity. So very often innovation is not simply about cutting-edge design that breaks ground architecturally, but design that makes clever use of a site, like below-grade or infill construction.

At Emerson we recently completed the Tufte Center, a building that has no frontage. It's at the end of Allen's Alley, between the Majestic Theater and the State Transportation Building, on a site that probably could only be used either by Emerson or the Commonwealth. You can't see this building, really; it's almost invisible. This building has no outside; it's all about the inside. But because it's a performing arts building, which means it's largely windowless, we were able to make it work on that site.

Elizabeth Padjen: Are institutions the owners who can best take design risks? Bill Mitchell, the former architecture dean at MIT, argues that MIT has a responsibility to keep pushing the design envelope.

Robert Silverman: Personally, I do think institutions should take some risks and set an example. We had a building that just went into construction on Boylston Street, part of Piano Row. What's most innovative about that building, aside from the

> Institutions typically have the wherewithal to have a long vision, longer than the financial parameters of a typical development deal. — *Roger Cassin*

fact that about a third of it is underground, including a tournament-sized basketball court, is that we're trying to get it LEED-certified [Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design], which on an urban site is not easy.

Elizabeth Padjen: One of the most innovative new buildings in this area is the Genzyme building — which was developed by Lyme Properties. It's considered to be on the cutting edge of building technology and especially green technology. I wonder if the success of that building and the enormous publicity it has received have established a new measure, a new standard for a certain kind of risky design and construction.

Peter Madsen: I was working on a building with many of those attributes in London. It stopped because the market turned. It was a building with an active-wall system, interior glazing, double exterior glazing, radiant chilled ceiling, all kinds of heat-exchange attributes. The cost of all that innovation made sense because it had large floor plates and was efficient. I look at the Genzyme building and think, that would be a good building in Germany, where by law, nobody can work more than five meters from natural light and you have to have fresh air. It's a very inefficient building in terms of floor area I suspect, but as a consequence it's very delicate, and it just feels wonderful to be in it.

Ronald Druker: I don't think there's anyone who doesn't believe in environmentally appropriate design. It's a question of whether the commercial market will support it and whether you can get payback. I think an institution has a real responsibility to do things which are morally appropriate, and I think that their return on their investment is different. Developers should be as well, but they have to function within a financial framework. And if greenness can become something that is financially rewarding in the short and long term, if the payback and the benefit to the tenants and the benefit to the marketing of the building are such that it makes sense in the marketplace, then you'll see a lot of green buildings. But until that happens, you're going to see buildings that are somewhat green but not to the top level. Because commercial for-profit developers just can't afford to do it as perfectly as a company or an institution.

Roger Cassin: I think the industry is committed to the green building concept, but not enough to lose money at it. It's almost like edge theory: interesting things happen at edges when there's something out of the norm that's driving what's going on. And that has a lot to do with risk. In some cases you may have money driving a different kind of resolution. Genzyme didn't need to have the most economical building. Institutions typically have the wherewithal to have a long vision, longer than the financial parameters of a typical development deal. That's why institutions have a very important role in the community planning process. I think they are great and responsible clients when they do step up to the plate.

Robert Silverman: Green buildings are now popping up on campuses all around the country, so higher education and to some extent corporate folks are leading the way. Interestingly enough, it's part of how colleges market themselves, because they're appealing to a group of people who are in their most idealistic stage in life. Many students are looking for evidence of social responsibility by their colleges and universities, and that can manifest itself in how the institution invests endowment, and in the sorts of buildings it puts up.

Elizabeth Padjen: That brings up the question of what the motivations are for different kinds of risk-taking.

Peter Madsen: The motivation is reward. Risk is always paired with reward. You measure the risk against your comfort level. If you want to invest in bonds, the reward isn't very aggressive, but you can position yourself in different parts of the spectrum and get very different kinds of return. We were doing a residential project on land our company owned. Someone requested we model three different scenarios: What are the returns for getting permits? What are the returns for developing the building? What are the returns for holding it? The whole spectrum looked acceptable, but we decided that getting the permits was really where the value was created.

Ronald Druker: Let the next guy take the hit. There's risk in the first process but bigger risk in the second.

Roger Cassin: But the relationship between risk and reward is also the key to the design issues we've been talking about. Signature projects are where you really see a connection between risk and design. You get to a point where, maybe against your better judgment, you are involved and committed, whether it's to the community or to your own notion, and you go that extra little step, where you hesitate for a moment and ask, is the risk/reward ratio right here? OK, I'll go for it. And you hang in there. Ultimately you've got to sell the consumer, but at that point, you've sold yourself. And so you take that extra step, because the reward makes it worth it. ■

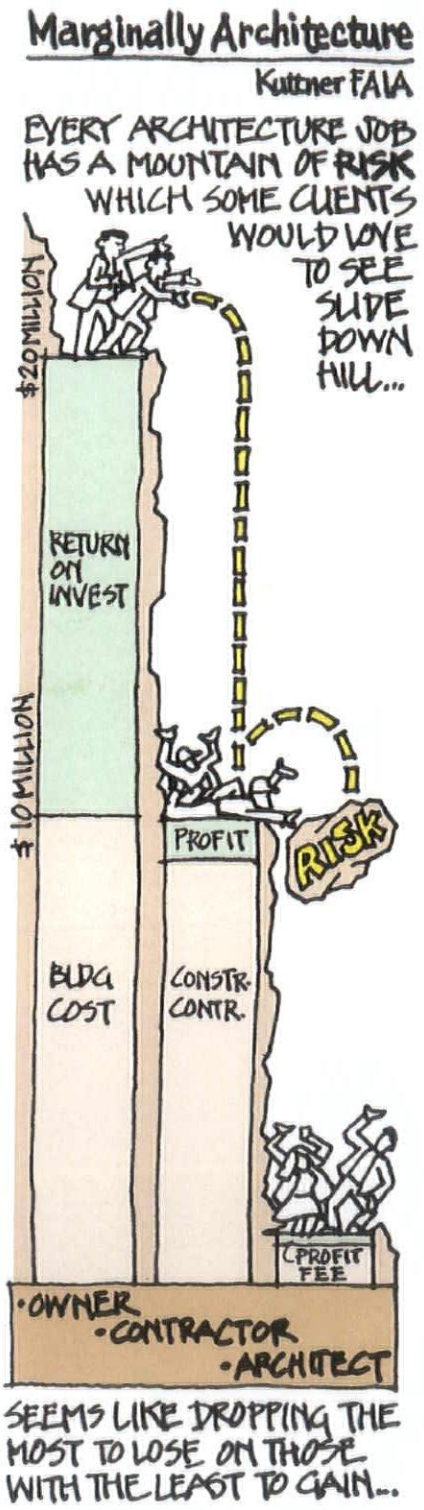
Drawing on Controversy

For this issue of *ArchitectureBoston*, architect and cartoonist Peter Kuttner FAIA submitted a drawing for his "Marginally Architecture" feature, which runs frequently in our Letters pages. This submission offers a provocative counterpoint to our roundtable discussion and prompted an internal discussion about changing roles in the construction and development industry — and varying perceptions of each of the players. Peter Kuttner offered the following commentary; we invite our readers to send us their response.

The cartoon makes the point that the financial aspects of risk are being apportioned to players who are not really stakeholders in the benefits. The architects have the least to gain financially, and while they are powerful players in the decision process, they are left out of the monetary rewards, beyond being paid for their services.

When it comes to sharing the financial risk of a project, architects have few assets to invest and a very small potential profit relative to the potential gain for an owner. However, owner-focused contracts are becoming more risk-averse and attempt to put more risk, often beyond the appropriate errors-and-omissions issues, onto the architect. Free redesign if the construction market goes up, defending the owner in court before there's any determination of error, extended unpaid construction supervision because the work continues due to the fault of others or the weather are all cropping up. Architects' lawyers and the insurance companies have long tried to limit the liability of the architect to the total value of the fee, but there is huge resistance to that in the industry and little success of late.

In this sense, architects are the victims of a trend in the industry. Many have tried to glamorize this sharing of risk as "collaboration" or "partnering," but it is still an illogical and one-sided step in my opinion. Being a victim does not necessarily mean one is weak. The cartoon tries to quantify the scale of how wrong-headed this logic has been. I would like to see the issue out on the table in our community.



Who Says You Can't Put All Your Eggs in One Basket?

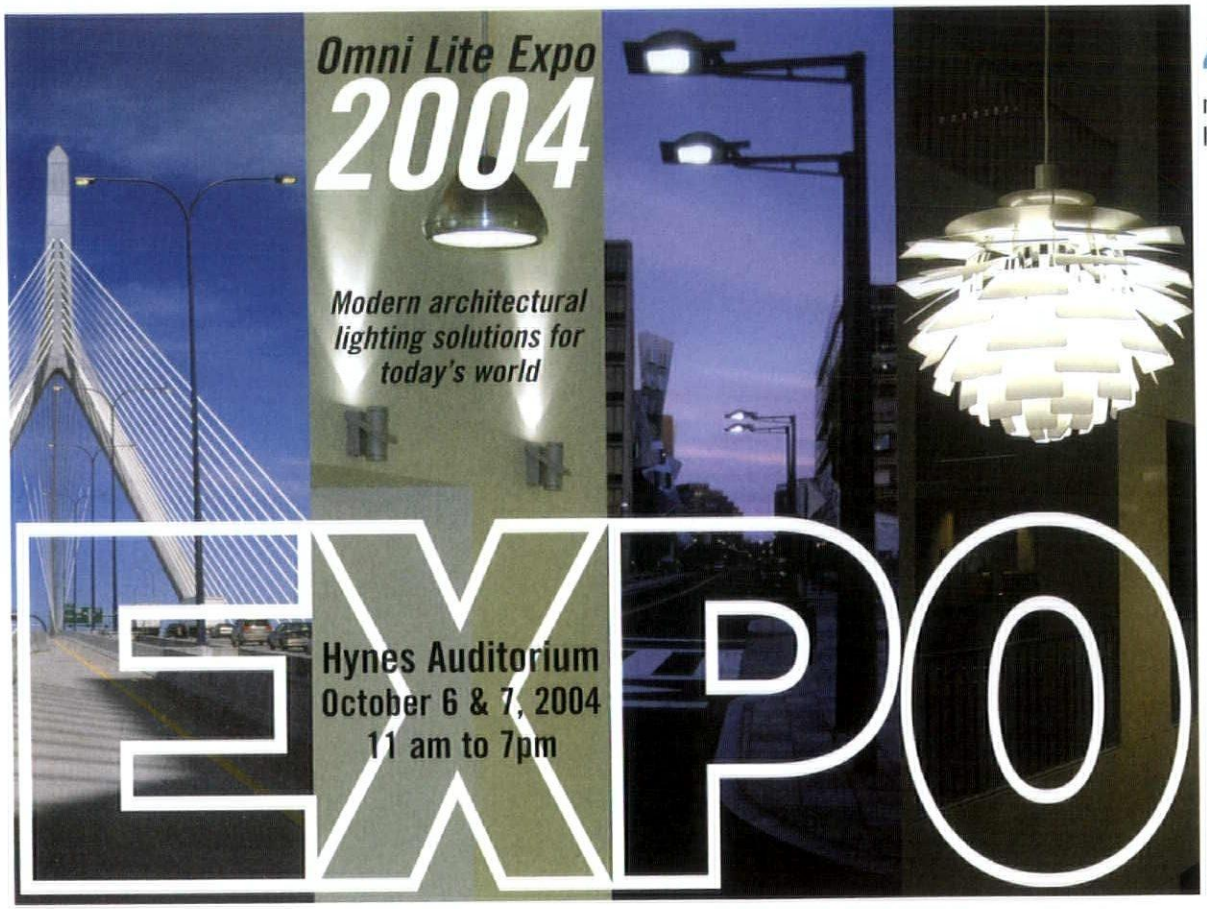
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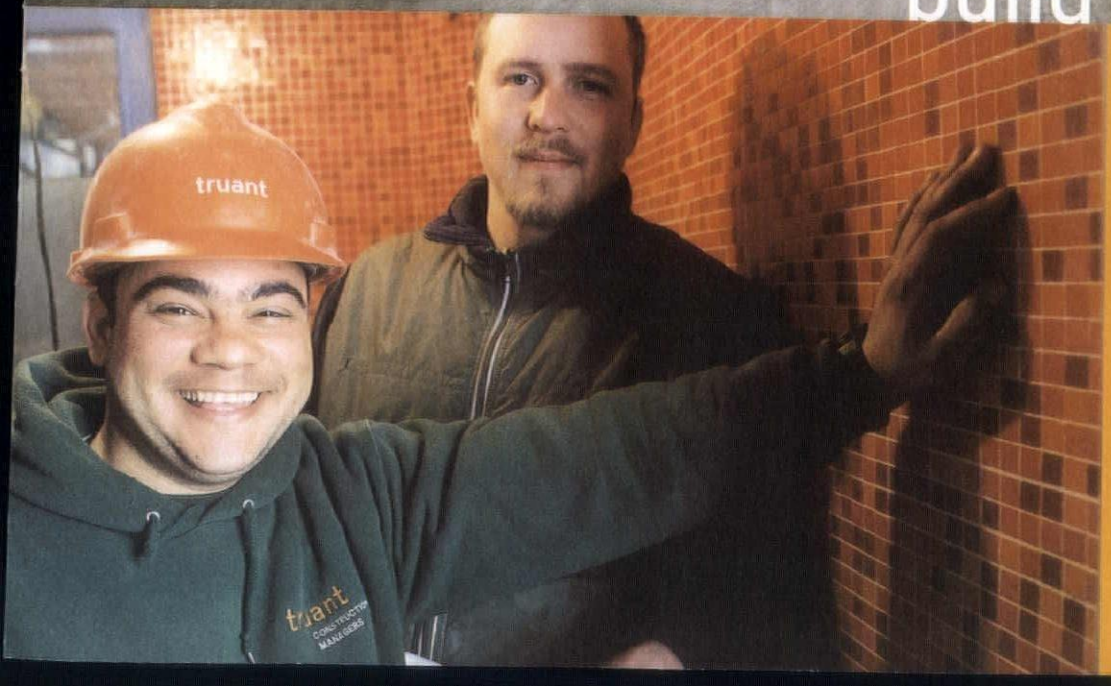
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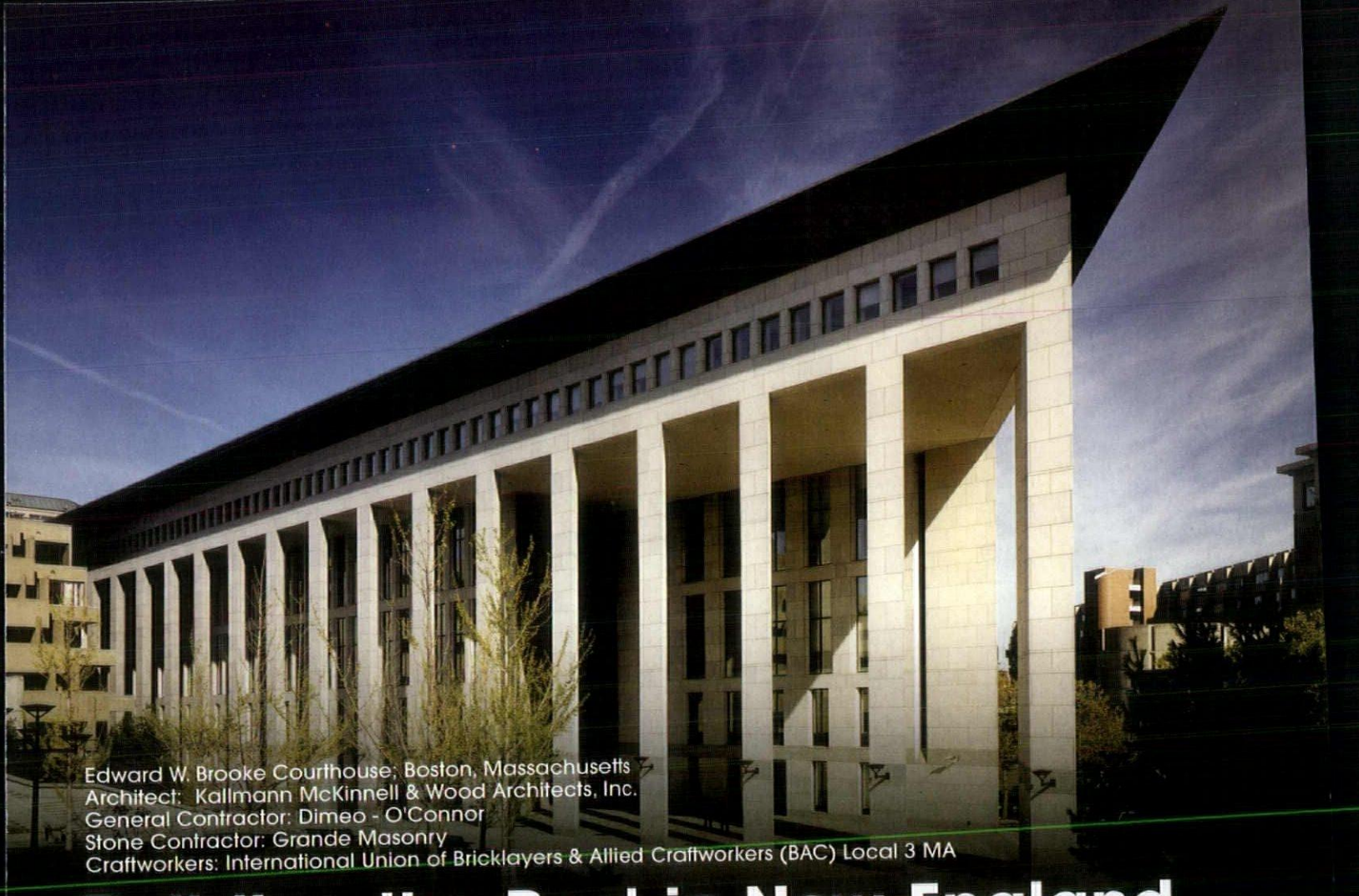
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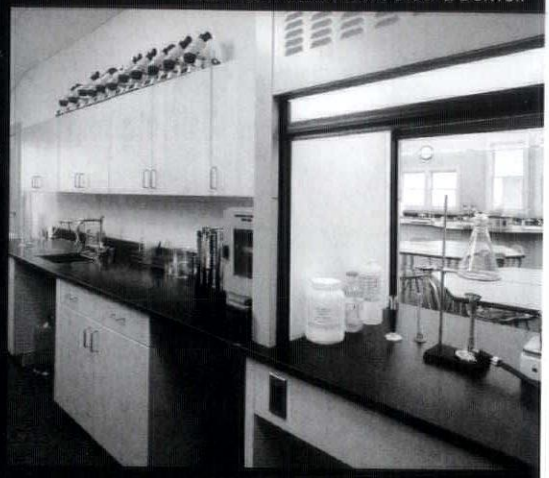
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Learning to Love Risk

By Ava Abramowitz, Esq., Hon. AIA

When I started out in the world of architect-lawyering in the 1980s as deputy general counsel of the American Institute of Architects, I learned that for many architects the world revolved around liability — finding its sources and avoiding them assiduously. These architects learned to see potential bugaboos in people, situations, and in words. When a menacing flutter of a red liability flag waved in the distance, these architects sang the "it's uninsurable" anthem. How loudly they sang depended on their personal "risk-o-meter." The lower their threshold for risk, the louder they sang until either the owner folded or one of the two of them walked away.

You can't blame these architects. In the 1980s, claims were sky-high, the price of insurance was higher still, and profits were thin. A claim here, a claim there, and pretty soon, a firm could find itself skidding toward extinction. So insurance companies and their brokers and almost everyone's lawyers taught architects how to parse out contract language and spot the danger signals of bad contracts and bad clients. "Limit your liability" and "No guarantees here" were the words of the day.

Architects learned well. By the year 2000, many architects could read contracts better than most lawyers. They fought over words even though premiums were at their lowest since the 1970s. They paid a price for their allegiance to the liability god, though. Other professions began eating their lunch, and many architects found themselves working for "them" — the ones willing to manage risk, not by words, but by conduct.

PATRIK GIARDINO/CORBIS

Why did the risk-takers in other professions catch on? Simply put, in America, it is the risk-takers who enjoy the spoils, not the risk-avoiders. That's the lure of entrepreneurship. As a result, many architects are taking up a new banner. "Risk and reward? We want both." How do people make the move from risk aversion to risk affinity and how can you do it, too? Here are some not-so-easy steps.

Step 1: Accept the fact that risk is intrinsic to architecture

Whether you are a one-year-old taking her first steps, a scientist designing the next super telescope, or a person buying stock, risk is facing you. You can't avoid it if you want to get anywhere. That is true about any venture, including every aspect of architecture. Heck, with the ozone layer depleting, it is even true about walking outside. Yet no one stays inside with their shades drawn, wailing, "It's sunny outside." Instead people analyze the situation, figure out the sun's adverse impacts on them and take steps to manage those impacts. The same is true of architecture.

Step 2: Think CARE

Take two research findings, weld them together, and you have your second step of learning to love risk. The first comes from claims research: A well-negotiated contract assigns a risk to the party in the best position to manage the risk and then gives that party all the responsibility, authority, and fee needed to handle the exposure successfully. This one is a no-brainer. There is no sound reason to assign an exposure to someone not capable of handling it, or to give anyone insufficient

resources to manage a risk they have assumed. Project success doesn't result from hedging; nor does design and construction excellence. Claims do. The better you are at using contract negotiations to achieve "front-end alignment" — that is, aligning risks, capabilities, authorities, responsibilities, and fees — the easier time all the design and construction players, including the owner, will have managing the attendant risks.

The second research finding comes from management consultants. When researchers surveyed the clients of doctors, lawyers, architects, and other management consultants, they found that clients want three things from their professionals — candor, competence, and concern. All professionals rated acceptably in candor and competence, but failed dismally in the arena of concern. Professionals were so busy trying to prove how smart they were that they spent most of the time talking about themselves and what they could do or were doing for the client. The more they talked, the more they were perceived as arrogant non-listeners who cared only about the bottom line — their own.

When researchers surveyed the clients of doctors, lawyers, architects, and other management consultants, they found that clients want three things from their professionals — candor, competence, and concern.

Now weld the two together. Clients want you to be concerned about them and, if they're honest, only them. Do it. Care for your client's success over your own. Care for the client's bottom line, their strategic objectives, over your own. Align **C**apabilities, **A**uthorities, **R**esponsibilities, and **E**xposures at the front-end — the first research finding — not to reduce your liabilities (although figuring out how to manage an exposure will do that), but to better help clients manage their risks. There is no better way to prove your concern for your client than to take care of them and their concerns.

Step 3: Expand your skills

Still afraid of risk? Before you decide to avoid a risk, first see if there is something you can do to increase your skills so you can mange it. Latch on to continuing education. Find that special consultant. Ask people you respect what they would do to manage that too-risky risk and then do it. (Still scared? Don't take on the risk. Building a strong risk-o-meter requires respecting the one you have. It will grow along with you.)

Step 4: Choose your clients well

CEOs from claims-free practices say that the first move toward ensuring their success was choosing their clients well. There are books written on this (the best one, naturally, being my own, *The Architect's Essentials of Contract Negotiation*). Each book recommends juxtaposing the client's problems and needs against your strategic goals and capabilities, as well as the client's strengths and weaknesses against your own, and then deciding honestly whether you can and want to help the client. In other words, will you two wear well together? If the answer is "yes," go for it. If you are unsure, respect your gut. That client probably is not for you.

Step 5: Practice "no-surprise design"

No matter how carefully a project is front-end aligned, something is going to go wrong sometime. No one knows precisely what that something is, but one guarantee all architects can give is something will happen to throw the project off track.

No-surprise design takes that as a given and requires each player in the design and construction process to make this promise: "Outside forces might deck us, but we will not blind-side each other. As soon as we have an inkling that something untoward is in the offing, we will tell everyone else, so that we collectively can put our minds together and strategize an effective way to handle it." Why is this important? Because studies show that all too often in project failures, someone knew something wasn't right but kept silent anyway. No-surprise design rewards those who speak up by solving the problem they uncover and facilitating project success.

Is this a pipe dream? On a lot of projects, it most certainly is, but owners who want half a chance of having their projects come in on time and on budget know the wisdom of attracting professionals to their project who think gain, not blame. It saves time in the short run, and money in the long run.

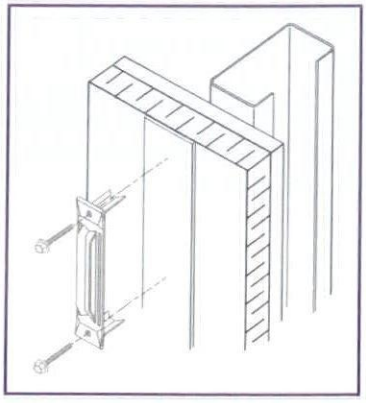
There you have it. Five steps to learning to love risk. All logical. All practical. All doable. So don't let anyone limit your practice — or your imagination. Not now. Not ever. ■

Ava J. Abramowitz, Esq., Hon. AIA, maintains a mediation practice and is an adjunct professor of negotiation at George Washington Law School. She is a founding fellow of the American College of Construction Lawyers, a former public member of the National Architectural Accrediting Board, and is the author of *The Architect's Essentials of Contract Negotiation* (John Wiley & Sons, 2002). Her e-mail is: avaesq@aol.com.

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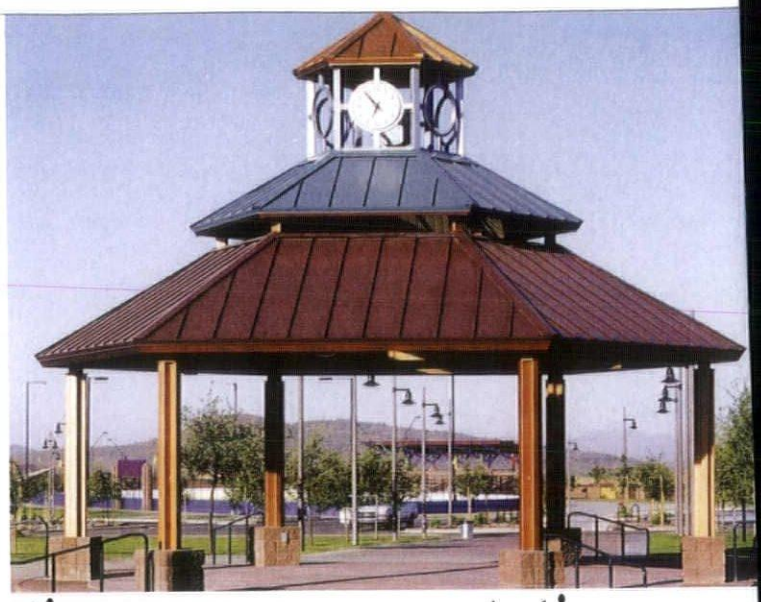
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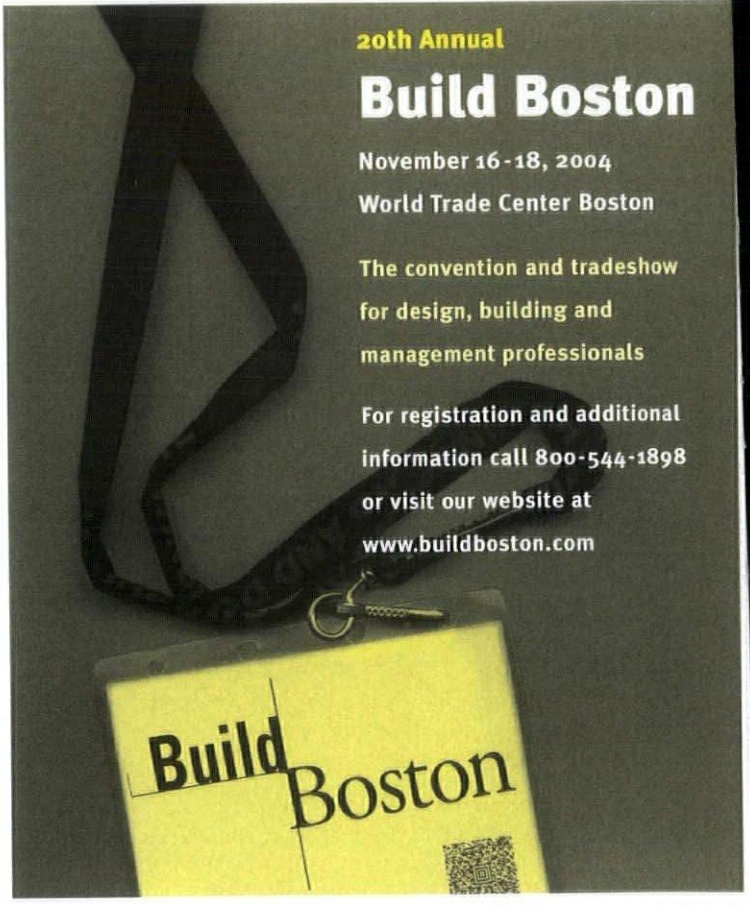
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Beguiled by Risk

We are what we build

By Jonathan Powers

Ours is a culture beguiled by risk. We love nothing better than to watch snowboarders careen down mountainsides, soap-opera characters conceal their extramarital affairs, and young dot-commers gamble on new business ventures. We put a premium on risk-taking, and successful risk-takers are often showered with fame and fortune. Innovative inventors and visionary political activists crowd the ranks of America's most storied heroes. Most of us long to drink more deeply from the cup of risk — or at least to be seen as more daring than we actually are. When other people chance what we won't or can't, we bestow celebrity status upon them and live vicariously through their actions.

Good egalitarians that we are, though, we also resent our favorite risk-takers for highlighting our own prudence, and so indulge in no small amount of *schadenfreude* when their risks catch up with them. Like children constructing towers with wooden blocks, we want to build up our favorite risk-takers merely to ensure that their inevitable fall will be all the more meteoric. We may thrill at the raw velocity and danger of stockcar racing, for example, but we also watch in guilty anticipation of the spectacle of fiery crashes. The morbid upshot of our taste for risk is that it implies a corollary taste for watching systems, plans, and people fail.

Unsurprisingly, our built environment evidences our ambivalent feelings toward risk. Although our design magazines flaunt images of architectural extravagance, for the most part we Americans have little patience for epic gestures when it comes to the places we build, and not without reason. The last convulsion of grand urban ambition in America — urban renewal — relieved an entire generation of its taste for adventures in city planning and heroic architecture. More than anything, contemporary American architectural sensibilities seem dominated by a strong sense of caution.

Paradoxically, seen from the perspective of history, our current pattern of development represents a kind of planning-by-default, which has broken radically from the pattern of clustered settlements that has been a hallmark of our civilization. With its mega-highways and metastasized monocultures, nothing quite like contemporary American exurbia has ever before been built. It's unclear exactly what we gain from our so-called conventional construction habits, but our spectacular material profligacy, flagrant disregard for the natural environment, and soul-numbing isolation from one another represent risks of the highest order. So many events could topple our system: a spike in oil prices, a shortage of potable water, or a society-wide crisis in family stability, to name only a few of the most

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likely. Almost without meaning to, America has embarked upon the grandest, riskiest enterprise in human building ever undertaken — and we've leveraged the futures of *everyone's* children and grandchildren to make it happen.

From the perspective of individual real-estate developers, contractors, and homebuyers, however, most day-to-day building decisions appear quite conservative. Not revolutionary designers, but businesspeople and financiers — as a group some of the most conservative members of our culture — have driven America's venture into exurban extravagance. Of course, this doesn't stop design magazines from conscripting the language of heroism and risk to contrive controversy about the architect-of-the-hour's latest boondoggle. High-profile buildings, which rarely differ from other buildings except in external form, draw reviews full of risk-talk the way an orchid attracts an entourage of hummingbirds. We rarely discuss our boldest risks, yet chatter endlessly about the trivial ones. For all the ink spilled praising the daring of Frank Gehry's designs, no one gets fired for hiring him these days.

So often the risks we laud loudest are little risks, involving small-hearted ambitions and small-minded ideals. We can do better.

Looking at the concept of risk through the lens of the built environment is especially instructive because infrastructure and buildings represent such substantial investments of public and private resources. As a society, we stand to lose a great deal if our choices concerning housing, infrastructure, and open space turn out to be misguided. But we stand to gain so much more if we build wisely. People take risks, after all, only when they stand to gain something of value, whether it be a thrill, a skill, or a pile of money. But because any investment may fail, risk haunts every one we make. What we call risk is simply the likelihood that an investment won't turn out well.

Attempting to ensure that our investments earn solid returns, we humans strive to mitigate risk — especially, it seems, when we invest in the built environment. One noteworthy example is the rapid development in the past decade of an evidently lucrative corner of contemporary architectural and urban design, which promises increased security through the use of "hardened" streetscapes, bombproof buildings, and surveillance systems. For certain kinds of threats, such services could conceivably tip an uncertain outcome toward success. Buildings, however, face more than one kind of risk, as do people. There are lots of ways to devalue a building, and even more ways to injure and/or kill people. Moreover, risk in general corresponds not to known threats, but to unknown factors that cause unpredicted failures. Because every investment — even an investment aimed at mitigating risks — confronts uncertainty, investing in security design itself entails new risks. Thick, windowless walls, for example, create visibility problems during electrical failures. The installation of inoperable bullet-proof windows forces the building to rely on mechanical ventilation. Security systems do not eliminate or even reduce the overall presence of risk; they simply redistribute it.

Each investment we make is thus an expression of our intentions, because it represents a choice about *which* risks we will tolerate. Building better walls and tougher defenses means investing in what those things represent, which is fear and suspicion. More than any other work of human hands, the built environment expresses what we value. Our towns and cities frame our public discourse, organize our economies, house our arts, and connect us to the earth and to each other. What we build expresses not only our preferred style of architecture, but also an investment in the kind of human beings we intend to become.

If actions speak louder than words, then concrete, steel, and glass must speak louder (or at least longer) than actions. Every building speaks to a hope, an intention that the future turn out some particular way. A developer builds houses hoping to sell them at a profit. A university builds laboratories intending that scientists use them to perform worthwhile experiments. Surveying America's built environment as a whole, though, it is difficult to understand what we are trying to say. Do we stand for quick profit and dehumanizing bigness? For artistic egoism and the right to nonconform as we please? For political and religious freedom? So often the risks we laud loudest are little risks, involving small-hearted ambitions and small-minded ideals. We can do better. In bringing order to space and matter, architects, planners, and interior designers open themselves to risk as a matter of professional necessity. No other group is better equipped to respond to the fundamental questions that now confront America: What do we value so deeply that we would stake our very civilization on its survival? How do we shape our buildings, bridges, and roads — the bones of our society — so that every American life expresses that value? ■

Jonathan Powers holds an MA in philosophy from Boston College, where he specialized in ethics, and a BA in philosophy from Amherst College. He currently works for the Affordable Housing Institute (www.affordablehousinginstitute.org), where he consults on housing policy issues worldwide.

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Boston: Home of the Brave

Risky new buildings get lots of attention. Who remembers risky *old* buildings?

By Elizabeth Padjen FAIA

Photographs by Steve Rosenthal

Risk, like an Olympic record, is a fleeting concept. We respond to the thrill, but its source quickly passes into obsolescence, as our attention turns to the next candidate that might offer a bit of excitement.

Architecture is peculiarly susceptible to this condition. Buildings once considered daring become commonplace. Sometimes the success of a new idea spawns copycats; sometimes what seems bold and brave quietly takes its place as part of the landscape. And sometimes buildings acclaimed for their startling invention meet the worst fate of all and are dubbed passé. On very rare occasions, a truly great building retains its freshness — its ability to surprise and delight.

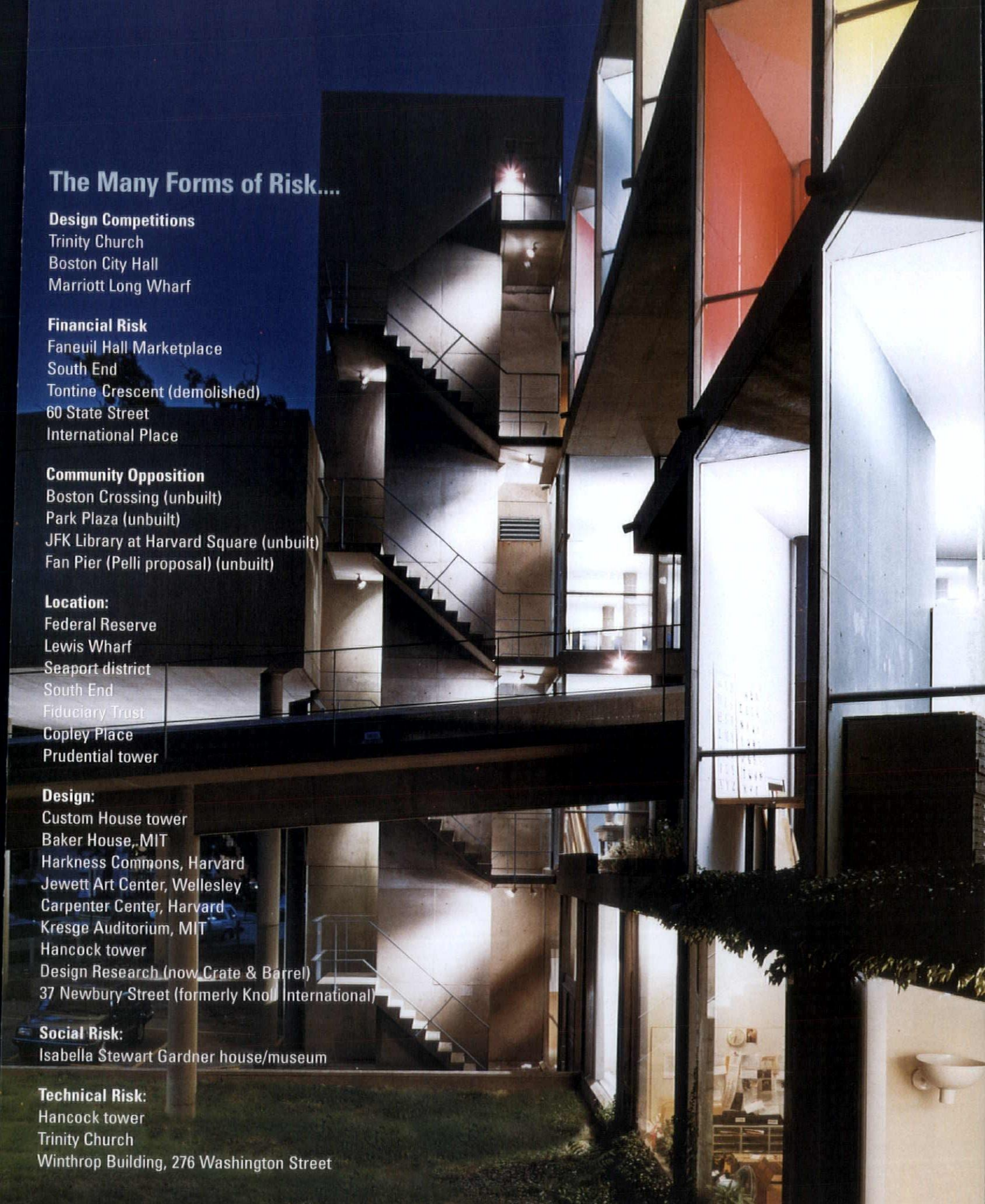
At a time when this region has seen a number of bold buildings meet with varying degrees of success (Stata Center; Simmons Hall; One Western Avenue; Hans Hollein's Mount Auburn Street building; the Genzyme headquarters), there is value in considering other buildings that in many different ways were the risk-takers of their time.

Courageous design is easy to recognize: the Hancock tower, Carpenter Center at Harvard, MIT's Baker House. But other forms of risk are often invisible and therefore forgotten. It might seem preposterous to imagine that Carl Koch took a risk in the 1960s in investing and rehabbing Lewis Wharf — on Boston's then seedy and disreputable waterfront. Newcomers to the city would scoff at the old prediction that the Copley Place mall would never work because it was both too far from Newbury Street and too far a drive for the suburban matrons who were the presumed customers. Changing understanding of urban geography has led to other daring moves: the Federal Reserve tower and the Fiduciary Trust building at the end of Federal Street were constructed on the uncharted frontier of the financial district. The Sonesta hotel was once a lonely outpost on the Charles River in East Cambridge.

Other buildings have taken risks by presenting new building types — packaging building uses in new ways. Villa Victoria in Boston's South End was a national model for a new way of building affordable community housing in the city. The Josiah Quincy School suggested that schools be built as urban villages. And the Faneuil Hall Marketplace (Quincy Market) presented a radical model that influenced "festival marketplaces" and shopping mall "food courts" worldwide.

Financial risk may be hardest to discern as the years pass. Few people remember that the First Baptist Church (a/k/a "the Church of the Holy Bean Blowers") on Commonwealth Avenue, H.H. Richardson's first significant commission, proved to be such a financial burden to its owner, the Brattle Square Church, that the congregation voted to disband four years after its construction. Yet the story of Faneuil Hall Marketplace — how Boston's bankers shied away from developer Jim Rouse and architect Ben Thompson — lives on, nearly a tribal legend by now. Why do we love it? Because it's a classic American story of risk and perseverance rewarded by success, and — like Paul on his horse — it happened here. ■

Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts
Architect: Le Corbusier with Sert, Jackson and Gourley



The Many Forms of Risk....

Design Competitions
Trinity Church
Boston City Hall
Marriott Long Wharf

Financial Risk
Faneuil Hall Marketplace
South End
Tontine Crescent (demolished)
60 State Street
International Place

Community Opposition
Boston Crossing (unbuilt)
Park Plaza (unbuilt)
JFK Library at Harvard Square (unbuilt)
Fan Pier (Pelli proposal) (unbuilt)

Location:
Federal Reserve
Lewis Wharf
Seaport district
South End
Fiduciary Trust
Copley Place
Prudential tower

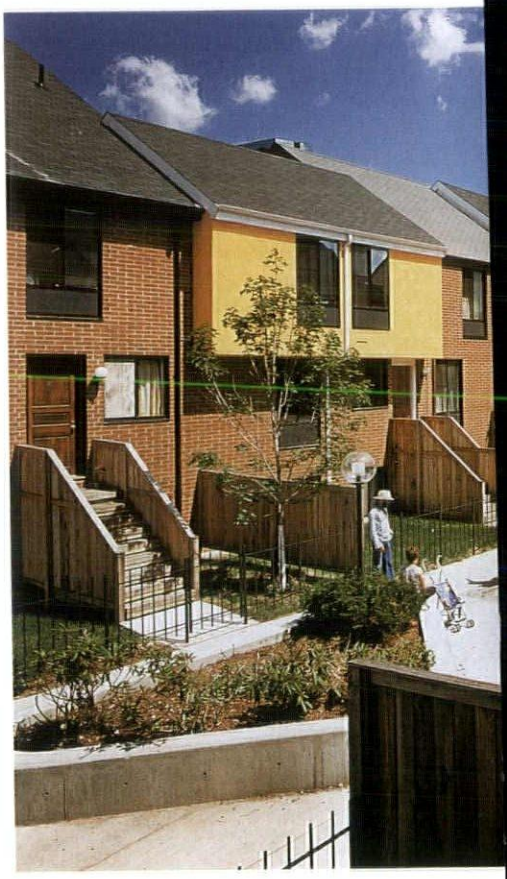
Design:
Custom House tower
Baker House, MIT
Harkness Commons, Harvard
Jewett Art Center, Wellesley
Carpenter Center, Harvard
Kresge Auditorium, MIT
Hancock tower
Design Research (now Crate & Barrel)
37 Newbury Street (formerly Knoll International)

Social Risk:
Isabella Stewart Gardner house/museum

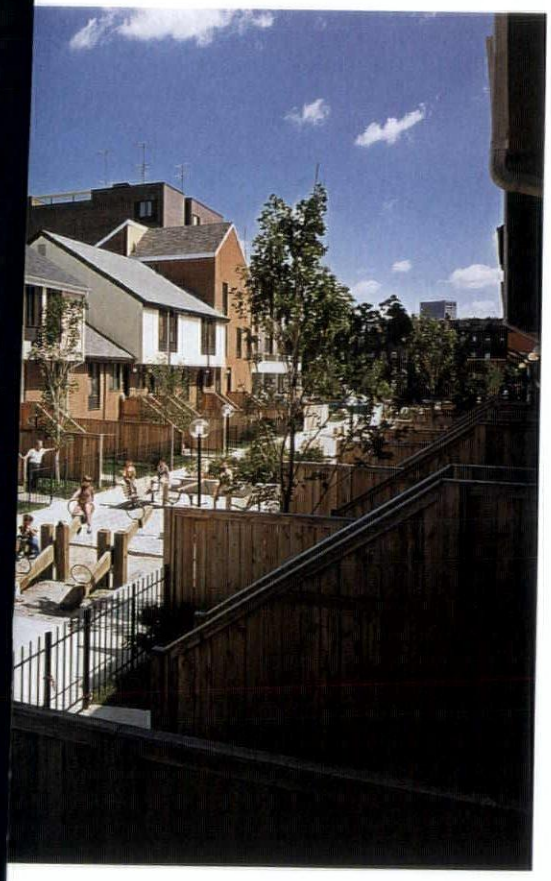
Technical Risk:
Hancock tower
Trinity Church
Winthrop Building, 276 Washington Street

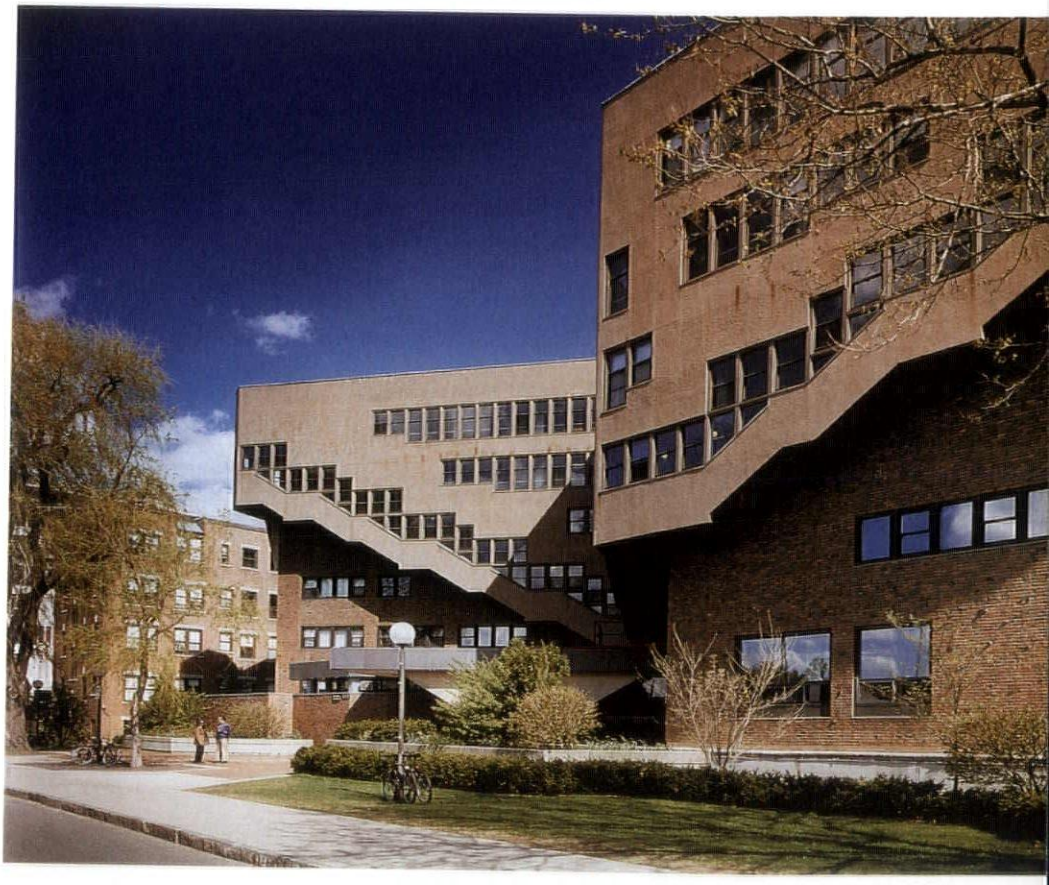


Josiah Quincy Community School
Architect: The Architects Collaborative

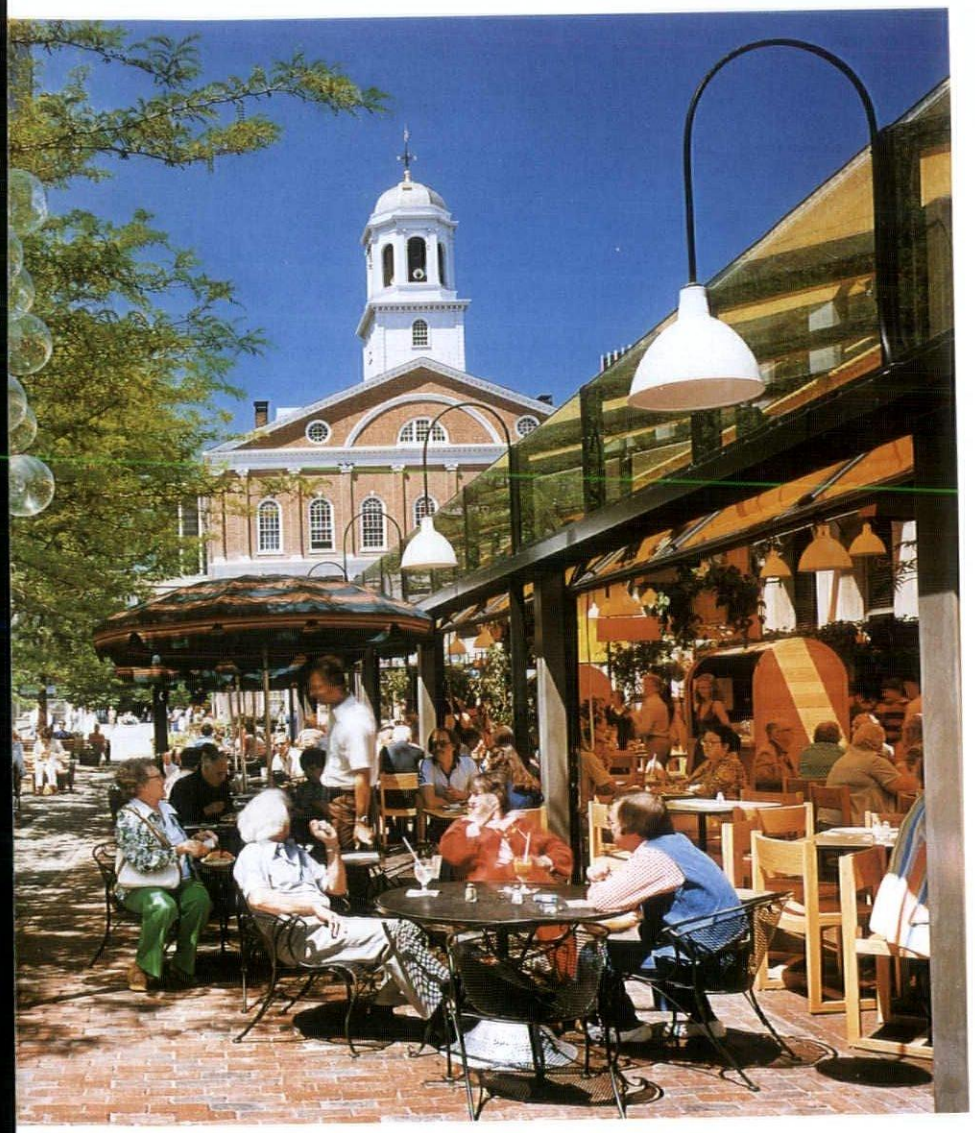


Villa Victoria
Architect: John Sharratt Associates

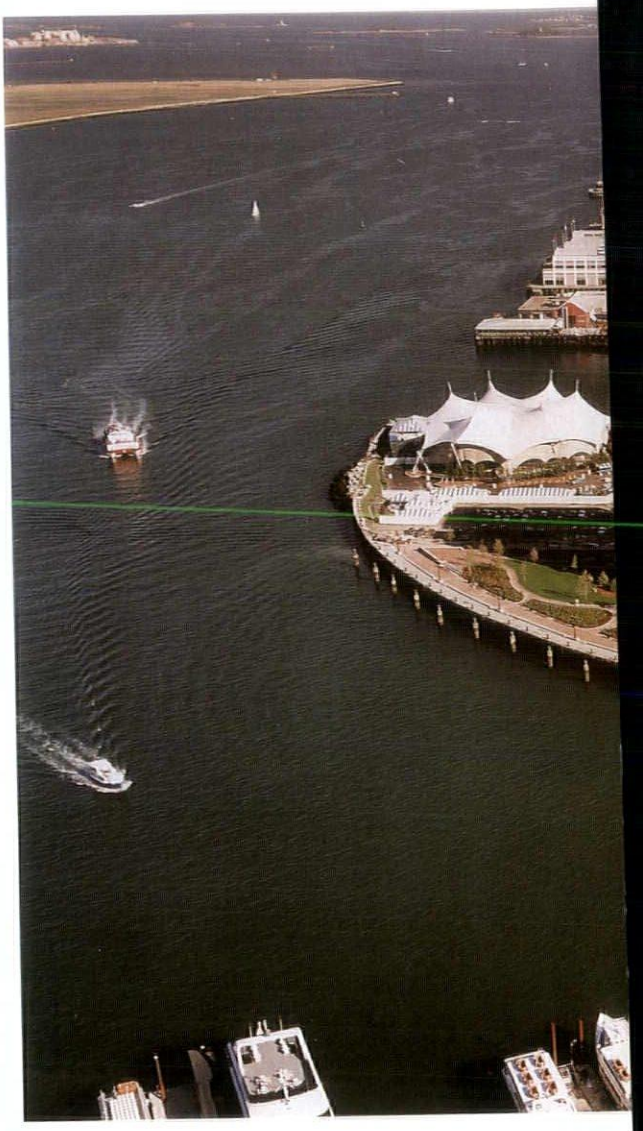




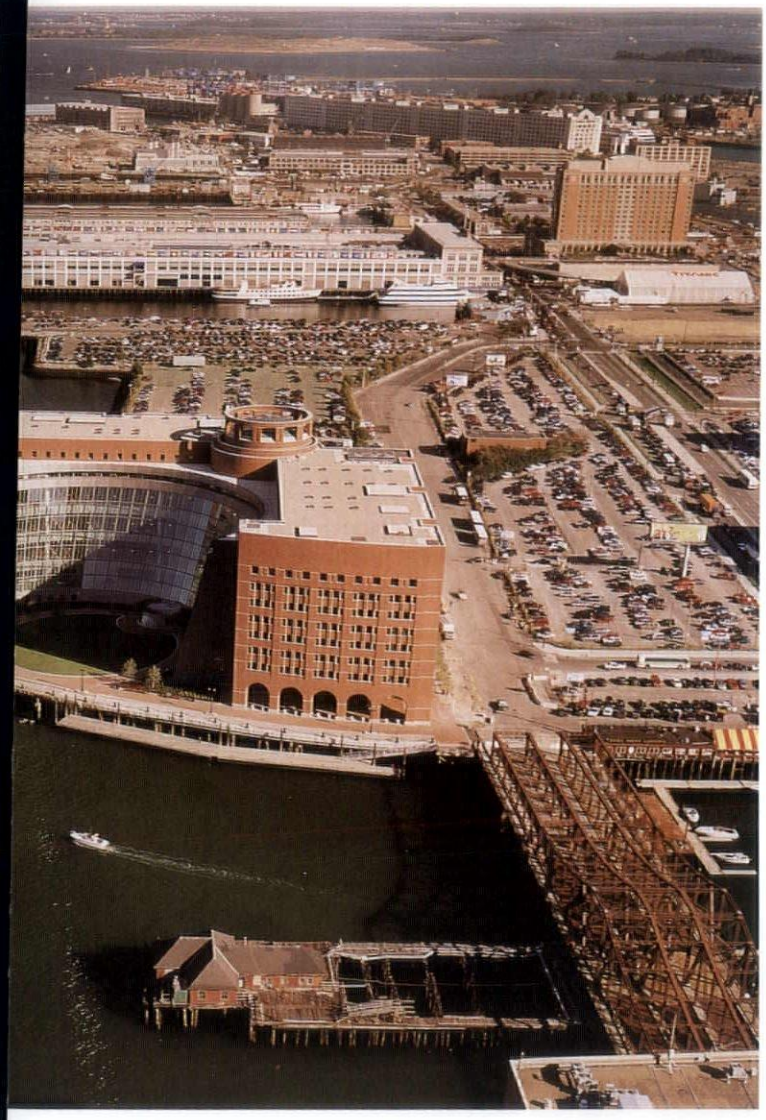
Baker House
Architect: Alvar Aalto with
Perry, Shaw and Hepburn

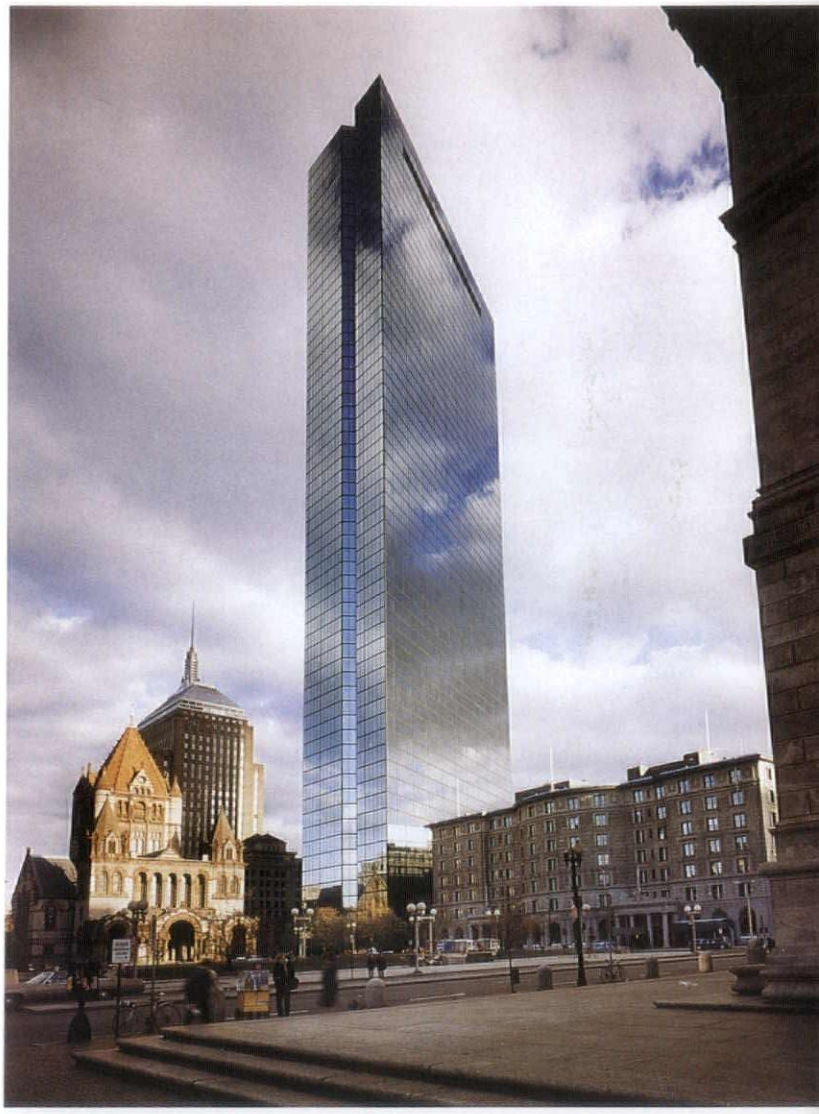


Faneuil Hall Marketplace (Quincy Market)
Architect: Benjamin Thompson and Associates



Seaport District
(foreground: John Joseph Moakley US Courthouse
Architect: Pei Cobb Freed & Partners with
Jung | Brannen Associates)





Trinity Church
Architect: H.H. Richardson
John Hancock tower
Architect: I.M. Pei & Partners

Improvidence: A Camera, a Passion, and a Call to Arms

By Donald Maurice Kreis

"Am I under arrest?"

It was not a question that a middle-aged lawyer with no criminal history, but who moonlights as an architecture critic, was accustomed to asking a police officer. But this was a new place — the only major city in New England that this potential troublemaker had previously never visited — and the cop had certainly made clear that the tourist he was addressing, on a downtown street corner within sight of a big, gleaming McKim, Mead & White building, was not free to go.

"Don't make me embarrass you," said the gendarme, apparently having decided that his mark was the sort of fellow inclined to avoid a public scene. Actually, with no one around but strangers, the traveler was almost curious enough to call his bluff. Ultimately it was not fear of embarrassment but fear of wasting an otherwise pleasant Saturday afternoon that led the miscreant to acquiesce and follow the cop into the nearby shopping mall where two stern-faced security guards joined them.

Call this brush with the law a case of attempted architectural photography.

Charles Follen McKim, whose building looked down on the crime scene, might have appreciated the caper, though his work was not directly implicated. Rather, the architecture in question came from Arrowstreet, the Cambridge-based designers whose retail accomplishments include everything from the imposing CambridgeSide Galleria to the folksy false forest of the Centerra Marketplace owned by Dartmouth College. Just as McKim had once re-created the Baths of Caracalla over the tracks of the Pennsylvania and Long Island railroads in Manhattan, here in a major southern New England city, Arrowstreet had cantilevered a cathedral of commerce (complete with Gothic arches) over a


Nikon

set of busy railroad tracks — at the very spot where the tracks themselves cross a river.

The building is designed so that one cannot be distracted from the important act of shopping by these intriguing structural facts. Rather, it is only from the sidewalk along busy Francis Street that what appears at a distance to be a courtyard proves to be a space open to the river and the railroad below. An otherwise undistinguished commercial building is suddenly a bridge, and there is the faintest hint of the pleasure one gets out of the Ponte Rialto in Venice or the Ponte Vecchio in Florence.

The pleasure was short-lived in this instance, however, because the visitor had dared to pull out his camera as he strolled down Francis Street and to aim it at the river and railroad tracks below. A mall security guard indignantly marched up to the tourist and instructed him that photography was prohibited. Outraged, the travelling critic snapped — his shutter, that is. The guard began chattering urgently into his two-way radio, summoning the aforementioned official representative of the city's constabulary.

A word here about Francis Street, cameras, and architecture. As best a visiting attorney is able to ascertain without conducting a title search, Francis Street is a public thoroughfare, in a city with a visitors' bureau that is actively promoting the kind of tourism that should reasonably be assumed to include photography. An attorney who is also an architecture writer quickly grows accustomed to being hassled by security guards when wandering into privately owned but publicly open buildings and taking pictures of the architectural features in plain view. Indeed, the lawyer/critic in question was once thrown out of a different Arrowstreet project — a Hannaford Brothers supermarket in another great New England city — for precisely this transgression. On that occasion, the visitor was openly accused of industrial espionage, presumably on behalf of a competing supermarket chain.

Ultimately, no spy ring was busted in the Case of the Francis Street Caper. No threat to the republic or to public order came to light by detaining a shutterbug who didn't fit even the most imaginative terrorist profile. Once inside, the security guards suggested that their suspect could resolve the situation by identifying himself and explaining his purposes. Our hero gave the guards his business card and explained that he was a tourist in their fine city, not wanting to complicate things by admitting so shady an avocation as architecture criticism. After successfully demanding the opportunity to inspect the driver's license of the perpetrator, they set him free, kept the card, and warned him that he could soon be hearing from the mall's lawyers about "trademark" violations.

But Was It Legal?

Exactly how risky is photographing a building from a public sidewalk without permission? Not very, according to Peter J. Gardner, an attorney at Stebbins Bradley Harvey & Miller in Hanover, New Hampshire, and chair of the New Hampshire Bar Association's Intellectual Property Law section. He starts by noting that it's a question of copyright rather than trademark law — and that both are federal statutes applicable throughout the country.

Architectural designs do enjoy protection under the federal Copyright Act, according to Gardner. But, he adds, the law specifically allows the taking of photographs as long as the building is "ordinarily visible from a public place."

"That said, it may be prudent for those who wish to photograph buildings to note that while they may indeed have certain rights under copyright law, they may be prevented from availing themselves of those rights if, as a practical matter, they must trespass to do so," said the intellectual property expert. In other words, stay on that sidewalk!

The lesson of the parable is not that shopping malls need to do a better job of briefing their security personnel about intellectual property law (since they ought to know the difference between a trademark and a copyright, the former being obviously irrelevant to this situation). Nor is the lesson that something is profoundly rotten in our culture when the supposedly public architectural realm has been so thoroughly privatized that it is no longer possible for a person who loves buildings to take pictures of design features that seem interesting. That struggle was lost long ago, as part of a greater losing battle for excellent public-spirited architecture.

Rather, the lesson is that things have gone too far when private security forces are in league with the police in an effort to deter the architecturally curious. That is why our suspect snapped (photographically speaking) when first confronted, and why every architect and every American who cares about architecture should start packing a concealed weapon in the form of a camera.

Whatever these building owners have to hide is something that urgently needs to be exposed. ■

Donald Maurice Kreis is an attorney who writes about architecture for the *Valley News* in Lebanon, New Hampshire and other publications. His website is www.dmkdmk.com.

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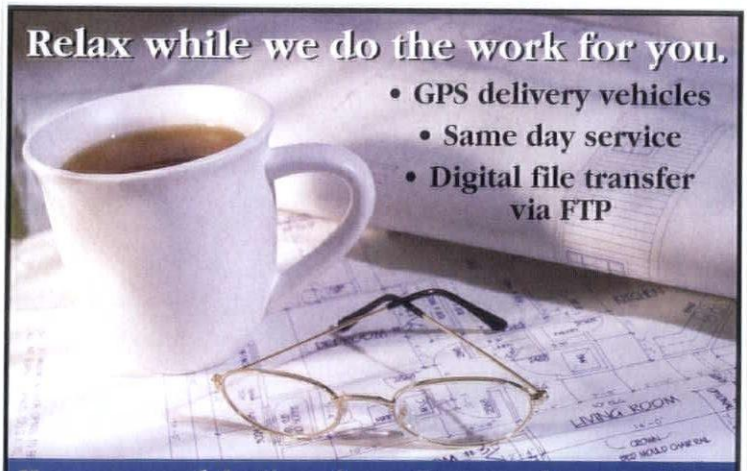
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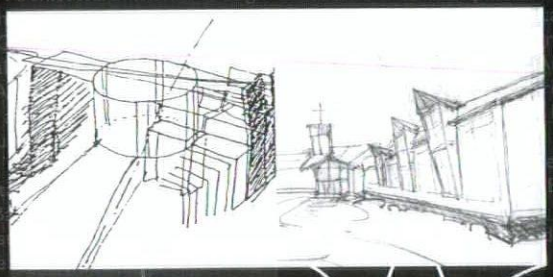
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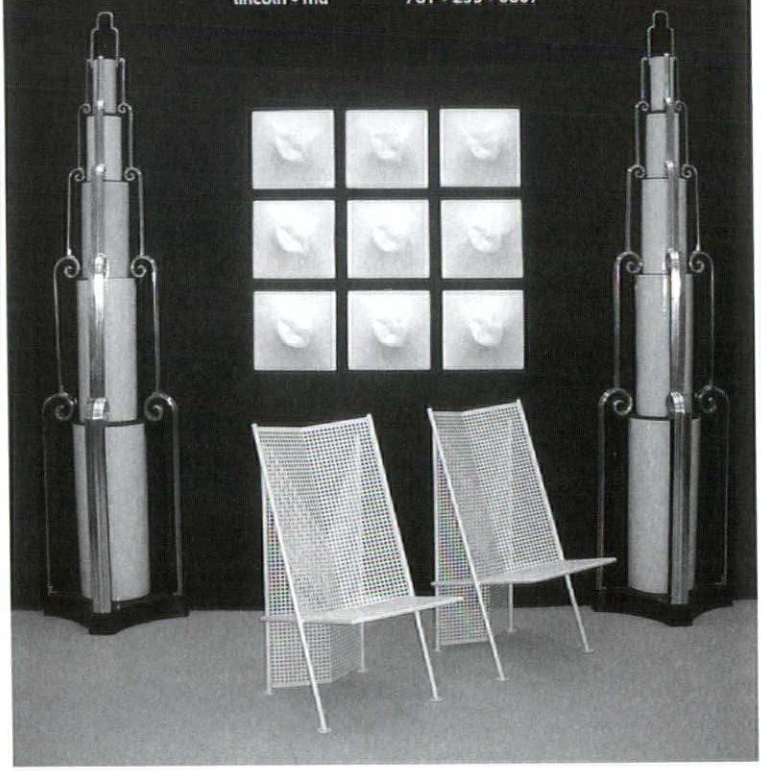
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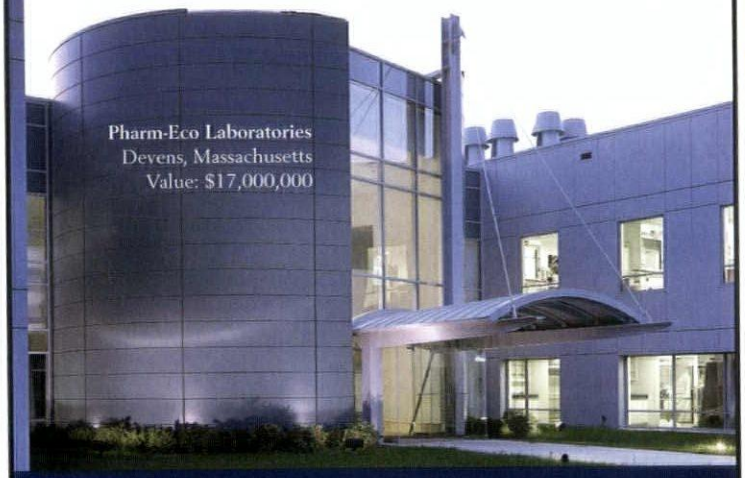
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It Takes a Village to Loosen Up That Bow Tie

By Julianna Waggoner, Assoc. AIA

"Hey! Aren't you one of those idiots?" says the man to my right at the breakfast counter, as he leans closer and peers into my face.

I'm in the local diner, eating eggs and reading a book. Do I smack this guy? Nah. I smile in a friendly way and say, "Yes, I am. Actually, it's Jidiot. The Villa Jidiots."

"I love you guys!" he says.

I am a member of a professional comedy improvisation troupe. We are known for getting onstage in front of an audience and doing something that terrifies the average human being: making up a performance on the spot, based on ideas tossed to us by audience members. We do this in front of...oh, say, 200 people. That's 200 live, opinionated, judgmental people.

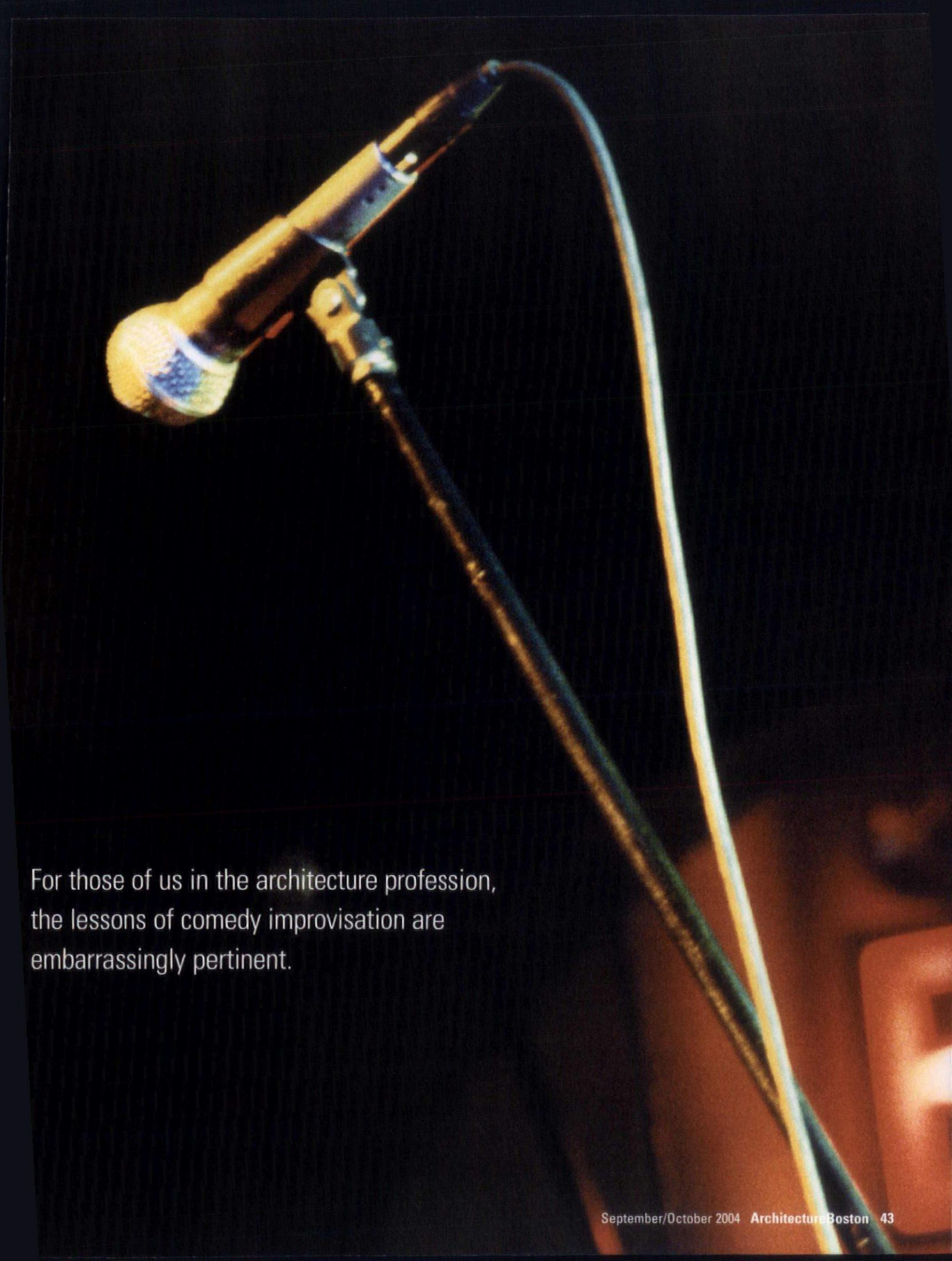
Often called "comedy without a net," improvisation is the performance style made famous by TV's *Whose Line Is It, Anyway?* The basic tenets of successful improv involve being able to embrace risk, accept the possibility of failure, and have faith in one's own creativity. Many performers discover, however, that these ideas are also invaluable personal and professional life tools. After all, life doesn't have a net, either. If it did, what would all those nice life insurance salespeople do?

For those of us in the architecture profession, the lessons of improv are embarrassingly pertinent. Although working in a creative field necessarily involves risk, I've found that we who are drawn to architecture have certain personal characteristics that can make the phrase "accept the possibility of failure" sound surprisingly like "re-enact core childhood trauma." We tend to be perfectionist, headstrong, and a tad, shall we say, *uptight*. We can be driven by ego and dogged by low self-esteem. We like being right. Looking like an idiot is the last thing we want to do.

In improv, looking foolish is always a possibility. Improv performers smear risk and creativity into a petri dish and force growth — in front of an audience. It's a shotgun-start design charrette with 75 loose-cannon clients screeching out ideas, while the paparazzi snap photos. And for me, improv is like life. I don't know what's coming next. I don't know if I'll fail. I don't know if anyone will like what I do. And for crying out loud, there are people watching. So that improv performers don't just shoot ourselves and get it over with, we learn tools to cope with the risk — tools that are applicable in any field.

Just say yes! To everything — the good, the bad, the ugly, and the utterly absurd. Accept everything that comes and work with it. Saying "no" is akin to denying reality. Therapists, 12-step programs, and the Dalai Lama have been telling us for years that denial doesn't work in life. Two performers in an improv scene find out quickly that saying "no" doesn't work there, either — it stops the scene cold, stifles your scene partner, and kills creativity. If your scene partner says she has a cow in her ear, don't be a killjoy and say,

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For those of us in the architecture profession, the lessons of comedy improvisation are embarrassingly pertinent.

"People don't get cows in their ears, it's earwax." With that kind of imagination, you'll end up designing tollbooths or cat kennels. Say yes to her spectacular idea! Ask her if it's a Jersey or a Holstein, and if you can have a glass of milk.

If you're going to fail, fail BIG! This maxim should apply not to structural design but to ego. Risk falling smack dab on your face. Put your whole heart and gut into whatever you do. If you can't sing, sing loudly. Maybe you can sing and you don't know it! And if you're lousy, so what? It's more fun to watch someone who can't sing really belting it out than it is to watch someone squirm and try to be invisible onstage. And here's your surprise gift: it's more fun to be the person belting it out.

Listen! — to your partner. Pay attention to your environment. Improv performers get addicted to being The Absolute Funniest Person Onstage. Listening to others is hard. We become intoxicated by the ideas lined up in our heads, clamoring to be said. We stand impatiently waiting for the other person to finish speaking, and then we utter our fabulous one-liner. And it falls flat, because the scene has moved on while we were listening to our noisy little brain. Listening onstage is like being a good collaborator. We try to stay present and in touch, ready for what comes next.

No wonder we in the design professions are so uptight. We can hear those real peers and real critics out there, tightening their bow ties and pursing their stingy little mouths, judgmental machetes poised, waiting for us to make a misstep. Heaven forbid we should look foolish or...*wrong.*

Make good offers! This is improv jargon for being imaginative and generous in the ideas we share with others when we work together. It also means making your scene partner look good. In improv, we practice offering good ideas and situations to our scene partners, and sometimes just shutting up and letting our partners shine. The best scenes to watch and the most satisfying to take part in are those in which the partners work together, listen to each other, and generously offer each other their best. We're even working on getting it legalized in Massachusetts.

Open up your head and let the ideas drop in. Audience members often say to improv performers, "Where do you come up with that stuff!?" This is the big secret: we don't know. I can stand onstage and think hard about what to say next — and become nervous and rigid and spit out terrible, stilted lines. If I make my mind a blank slate and stay present in the scene, the next right thing comes without effort. The universe puts much better ideas in my head than I could come up with all by myself. Having faith — opening up and being a channel for creativity — is the spiritual aspect of improv, as it is of all artistic endeavors.

Improv can be frightening because it involves taking risks in front of others. But improv is really pure play. If you don't like earcow milk, you can shriek and snort it across the room — the audience will love it. Or you can choke on it, wretchedly expire, and emerge in the next scene with a Wile E. Coyote smile. Most people don't get to take risks with so few repercussions. Work and life are far scarier than improv. Recovering alcoholics chuckle that the word "sober" is an acronym for "son of a bitch — everything's real!" No wonder we in the design professions are so uptight. We can hear those real peers and real critics out there, tightening their bow ties and pursing their stingy little mouths, judgmental machetes poised, waiting for us to make a misstep. Heaven forbid we should look foolish or...*wrong.*

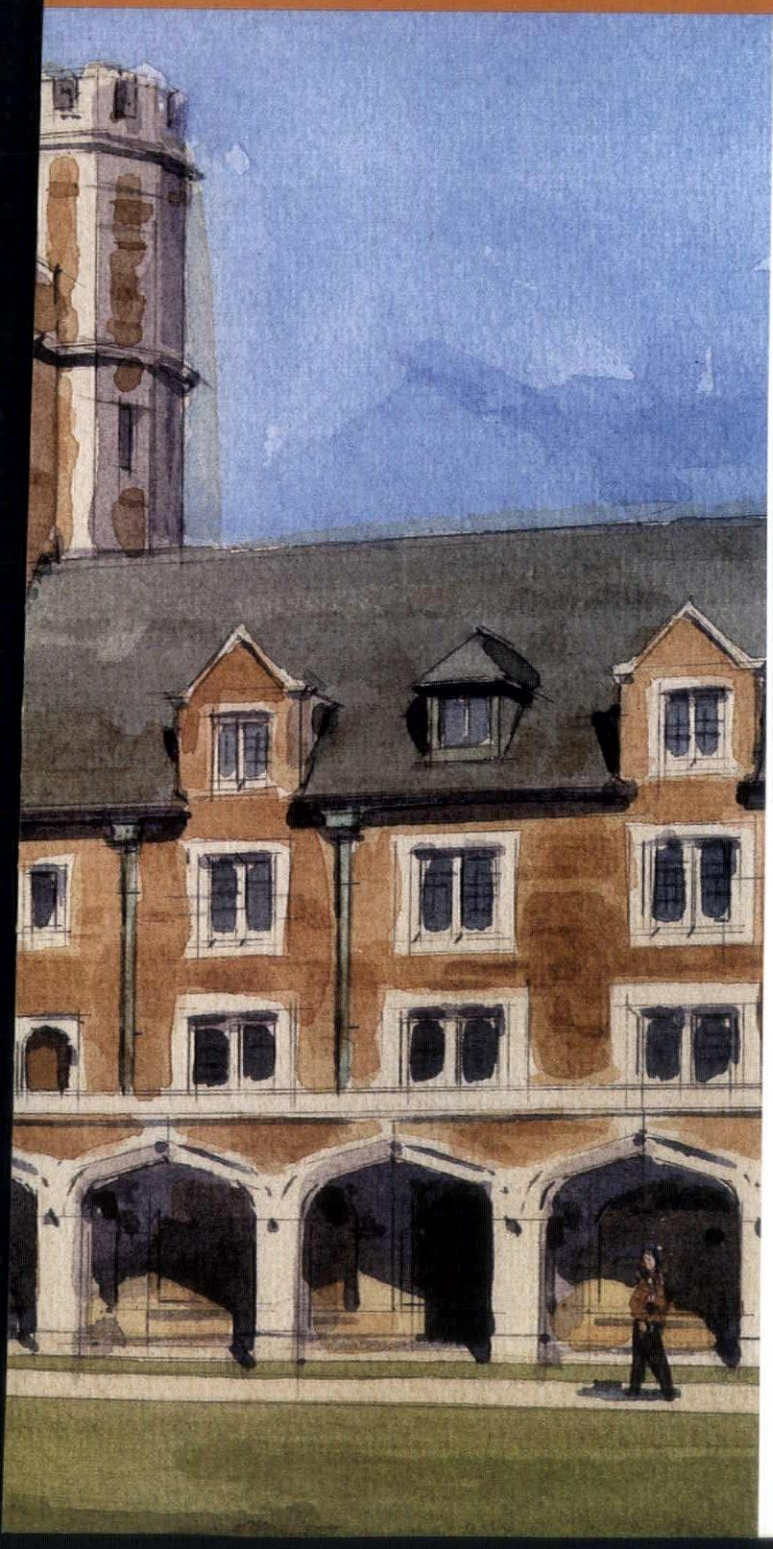
But the lessons learned in improv are the lessons we all have to learn in order to flourish professionally and personally. We gotta relax. We need to offer our creative ideas to others, gamble with our touchy egos, be generous, and commit our minds, spirits, and tender hearts in order to grow. Creativity isn't just about designing the next hot building. It's about engaging with people in our firms, participating as members of our communities, and being willing to offer something beautiful and useful to the world. Innovative design is risky, but being truly engaged is even riskier. That's the lesson I learn from improv: connecting is terrifying, but it ultimately brings more growth and creativity.

Why are we afraid of taking marvelous risks? What is the worst that could happen? If the answer is that you could look like an idiot, consider this: It just might get you recognized in public.

Julianna Waggoner, Assoc. AIA, is the marketing director for Dietz & Company Architects, Inc. in Springfield, Massachusetts. She has been a member of the Villa Jidiots comedy improv troupe since 1997.

A Traditional Revolution

Demetri Porphyrios talks with Jeff Stein AIA



Princeton University recently commissioned two significant new buildings: a science library designed by Frank Gehry and a residential college designed by Demetri Porphyrios. The Gehry building will follow the tradition of other Gehry buildings. The Porphyrios building will follow the tradition of Princeton's Collegiate Gothic style. Which poses the greater intellectual risk?

DEMETRI PORPHYRIOS is the principal of Porphyrios Associates in London and Athens. The recipient of the 2004 Driehaus Prize for Classical Architecture, he has been Thomas Jefferson Professor at the University of Virginia and Davenport and Bishop Professor at Yale University. He was educated at Princeton University where he received his MArch and PhD.

His work includes: Whitman College at Princeton University; Selwyn College at Cambridge University; Magdalen College at Oxford University; King's Cross masterplan in London; and the town of Pitiousa in Spetses, Greece.

JEFF STEIN AIA is the architecture critic for *Banker & Tradesman* and a professor of architecture at Wentworth Institute of Technology.

Jeff Stein: Do you think architectural culture has been hijacked? There's a sense, even here at the beginning of the 21st century, that we are still reacting to the violence done to European and American civilization by World War I.

Demetri Porphyrios: Architecture is about shelter and the symbolic representation of shelter. It embraces everything that has to do with sustaining life. The making of shelter has to do with a positive relationship with nature as well as urbanity — in other words, the whole tradition of putting buildings together in order to create a sense of place.

If one keeps that in mind as a condition for all good architecture, then I would agree that architectural culture has been hijacked. Architectural culture does not build *ex-novo*, out

Right: **Duncan Galleries, Lincoln, Nebraska**
Opposite: **Belvedere Village, Ascot, UK**

of nothing, just for the sake of novelty. No rational and responsible person can hold that view.

I am not impressed by the recent angst-ridden exercises in experimental culture, in either art or architecture. I find the nihilism of such a position both futile and debilitating. I cannot see how such a position can be the expressed aim of humanity.

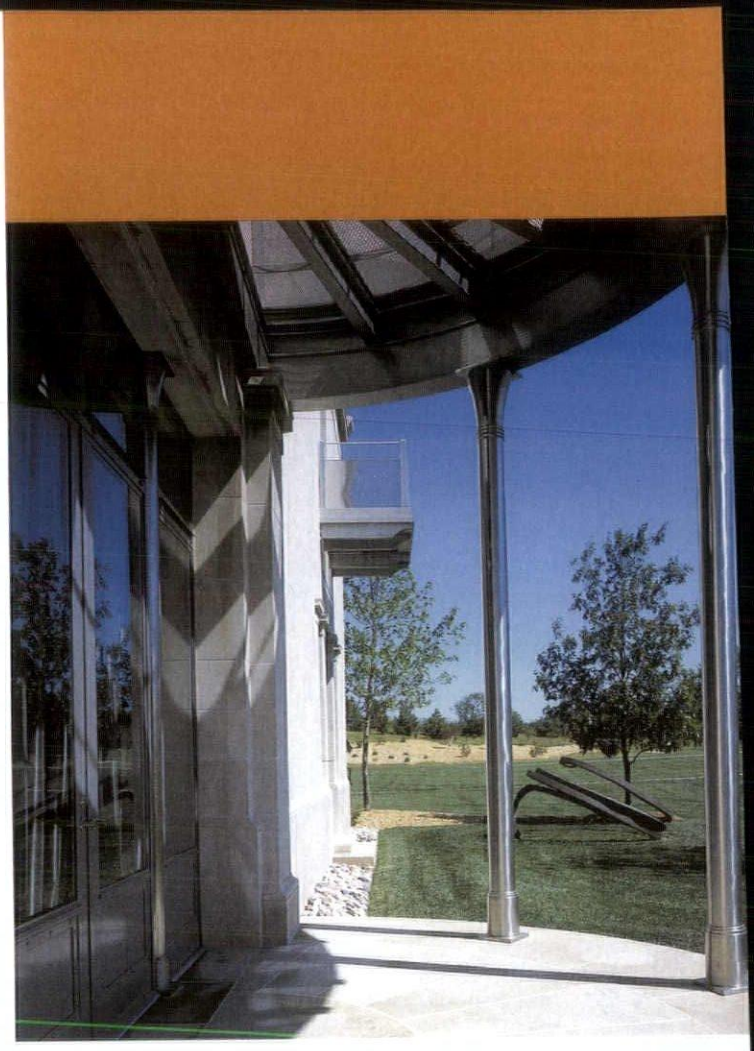
Jeff Stein: Yet many technology-based institutions and institutions of higher learning in particular imagine that they're furthering the culture by building those sorts of structures.

Demetri Porphyrios: Many of those institutions want a mechanical-looking building because they think it represents whatever they are producing. It is a branding strategy. But behind the façade, you find no real technology — there's a rather banal sort of structure and the banality of exposed HVAC systems hanging left and right. The only thing such buildings offer is an external sheathing that gives a neo-technological feel.

Jeff Stein: It seems to me that history as we think of it is a fairly recent idea. In centuries past, there was a tradition of making architecture that built on its immediate past and maybe altered it a little bit. Then, it seems that history suddenly became a sort of recipe book that you could choose from.

Demetri Porphyrios: I suspect you're referring to 19th-century Eclecticism. You are right — there had previously been no distinct sense of past, present, and future. Life was seen as a continuum. But in the 19th century, history became synonymous with the antiquarian revival of the past; one picked at the carcass of history and used it in whatever fashion one wanted. Then, in the early 20th century, another view arose, one that said history is useless — we'll start new with a clean slate.

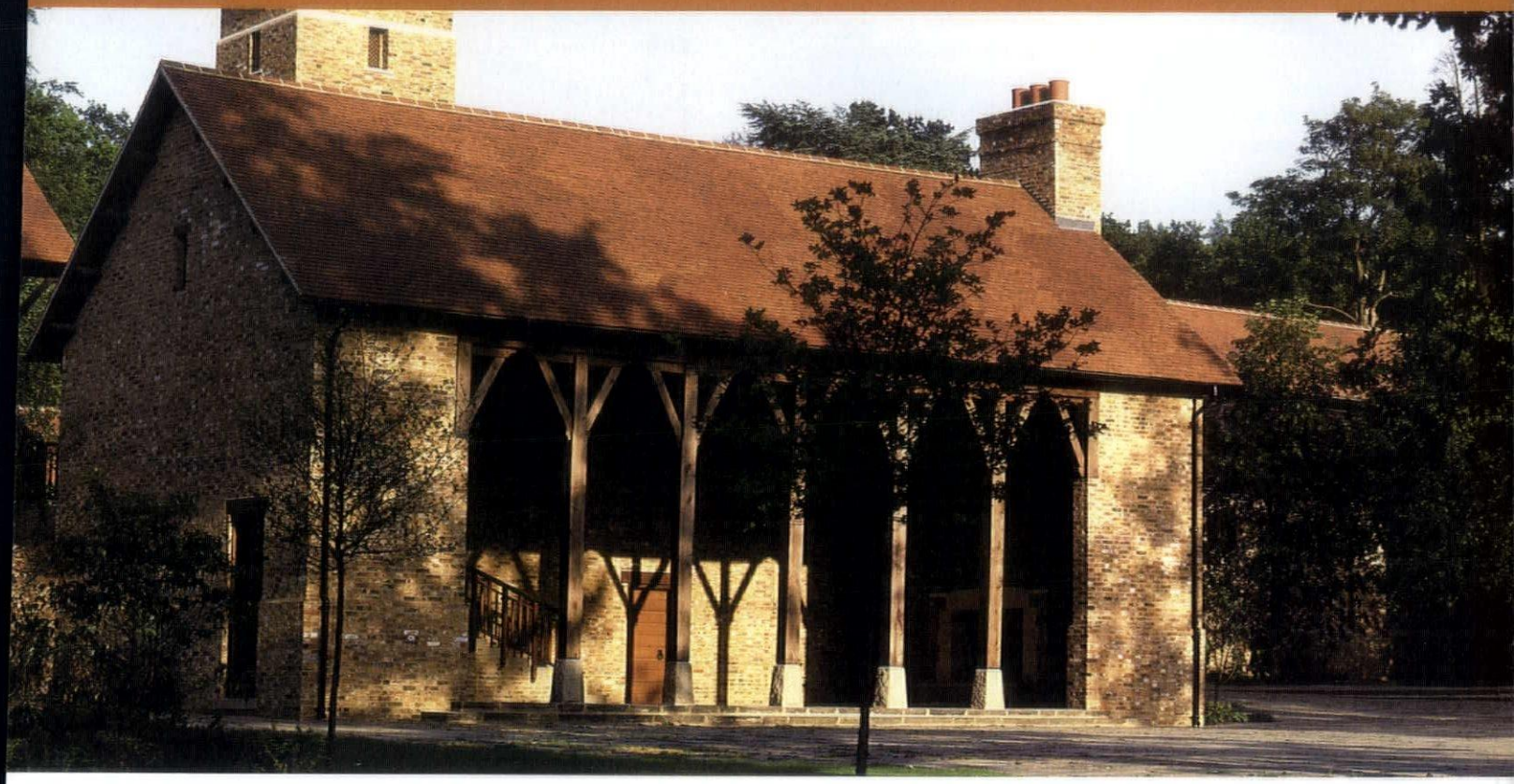
It's unfortunate that these two heritages — the 19th-century Eclectic heritage and the Modern heritage of the early 20th century — are polarized. My sense of what history and tradition mean has nothing to do with either of these two views. Tradition is the way by which humans learn to respect their forefathers, their friends, the people they work or live with. We learn from history — we learn from what we have done a hundred years ago or an hour ago. Life is a cumulative process of both achievement and failure. And that to me is history. That is why I love looking at architecture, say, of the 5th century, the 10th century, or of the 1920s. Not because I want to copy what was done. I am actually looking at the achievement and failure of human nature and trying to learn from them.



Jeff Stein: I suspect that there is a community of people who agree with you, who revere this notion and find that it's not accessible to them. It must be a struggle to present these ideas and make them available, although that obviously happens through your work. I'm thinking particularly about your little pavilion on the Hudson River in New York City. It explains classical architecture — everything one needs to know can be found in that piece.

Demetri Porphyrios: I've actually done very few classical buildings. The Battery Park City pavilion was a didactic piece with which I tried to explain what I thought was relevant in architecture. I tried to demonstrate the significance of technique, of craft, of typological reference and symbolic meaning. For me, that little pavilion was a commentary about the plan of the house, the idea of the atrium, but also about materiality and construction. Construction resides in the idea of the joint and of tectonics — the way by which something is constructed rather than simply how it looks. And when that form is taken up and repeated by other generations, it becomes typological form. It means something to people. It is recognizable and it has a powerful communicative and symbolic meaning.

Jeff Stein: Almost no architects in this country are trained in that way today — in which architecture starts from building.



Demetri Porphyrios: That is exactly why all fashionable architecture today is cardboard architecture. And that is why Postmodernism was and will remain fundamentally an American phenomenon. There is a schism between the building industry and the way buildings look. The architect is responsible simply for a cardboard façade, or at best, for some tricks of spatial organization. What I have been arguing for a very long time is that there should be some sort of appreciation of how one builds.

One can build frugally. Actually, some Modernist ideas about construction are very close to vernacular classical principles. Frugal, robust construction can be stone, timber, concrete, steel, whatever. I have no problem using materials that are not historic. One has to realistically appraise what is available today. It is a question of how one can build in a robust manner.

Jeff Stein: How do you reconcile that approach to construction with the idea of sustainability and green building?

Demetri Porphyrios: Sustainable architecture is something very different. Its concerns are not necessarily related to the issue of form-making. Sustainable architecture addresses ways by which we can recycle materials, and more broadly, the ways by which we can cohabit on the earth without ruining things. But the principles of green architecture have been grossly misunderstood. Green architecture today means double-skin and triple-skin glass in order to cool the building. That is total nonsense. It is better to use two-feet-thick walls, rather than have three sheets of glass with cold air in between. Calling that a green building is oxymoronic.

Jeff Stein: Yes. The debt that one goes into, in terms of BTUs of energy, to produce those three sheets of glass and transport them, means that the building has to be standing and either using no energy at all or producing energy for generations before it's paid back.

Demetri Porphyrios: Right. Passive systems of cooling, of heating, of maintaining a gradient of well-being, so to speak, within a building are much more "green" than active systems. By "active" I mean mechanically operated systems. There is immense enhancement of life that comes with using very simple materials in robust ways. This is one of the fundamental things that we seem to have forgotten. The reason for this is that the value of a building is determined by the fact that the mechanical systems last 25 years and so the building must be amortized within five years.

Jeff Stein: It's actually led to our devaluing of buildings. If you can amortize it in five years, you can tear it down in 10 and do another one.

Demetri Porphyrios: But that is exactly what is happening, isn't it? Buildings have a life span of about 25 years because HVAC costs represent approximately 35 percent of the total construction cost. After 25 years, do we renovate the building or do we tear it down and start anew? And with the current obsession with novelty and fashion, people take the view that it is better to tear it down.

Jeff Stein: And yet there is such a thing as evolution. The risk that you and your clients take is perhaps not one of visual culture or being considered backward about the form of architecture, but that of flying in the face of the priorities of current industrial culture.

Demetri Porphyrios: That is a risk. But there are pockets of resistance in our culture. Cultural and collegiate institutions are pockets of resistance, not because they are revolutionaries, but because they want to have buildings that will last for a long time.

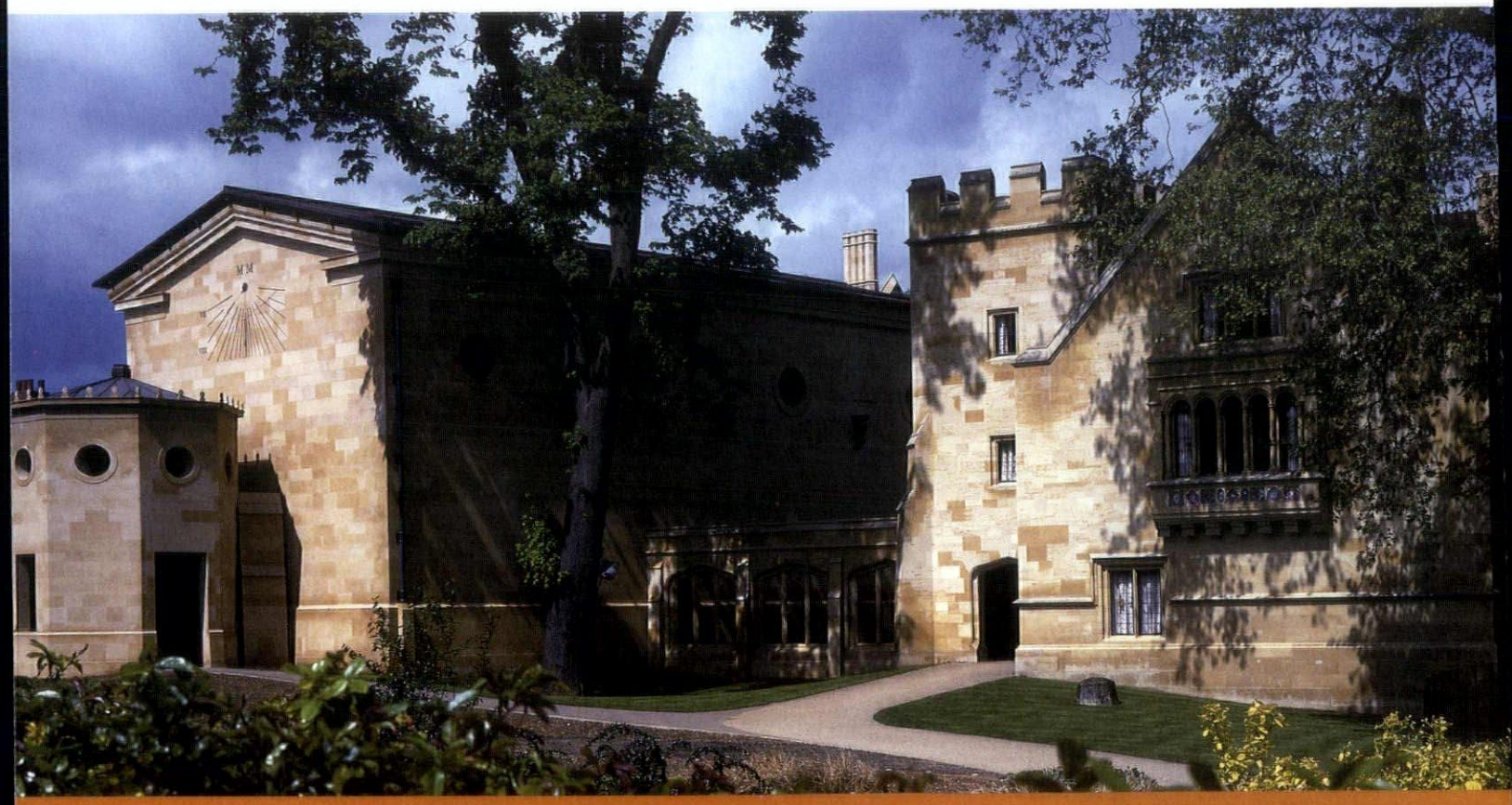
There are some developers who are adopting some of these principles and strategies, not for reasons of longevity necessarily, but for reasons of tactile quality. In our buildings, we insist that the external envelope has to be robust. The building internally can and does change with time.

Jeff Stein: Does this mean load-bearing walls?

Demetri Porphyrios: Yes, because that means approximately a 15 percent saving on HVAC due to the passive environmental performance of the building. In time, as the building changes hands, the new occupants can renovate the building internally. The building must have that flexibility. But it is interesting to note that they see a sense of quality in the robust external wall.

Jeff Stein: This conversation crystallizes the kind of thinking that is driving development today. And it's a little depressing, frankly. We are seeing a continuous rush toward invention without any real insight about the ways these buildings relate to one another, about the notion of the traditional city. In the middle of the 20th century, Lou Kahn talked about the urban street as being a public room. Of course, that wasn't really the case in America even then, and it certainly isn't now, because our streets are filled with automobiles. But you are working now within one of the few American models of a pedestrian community, the college campus — specifically the Princeton University campus.

Demetri Porphyrios: Yes. Whitman College, a new residential college at Princeton, is a project with the express purpose of cultivating congeniality and friendship and human relationships. There's no civilization without an exchange of

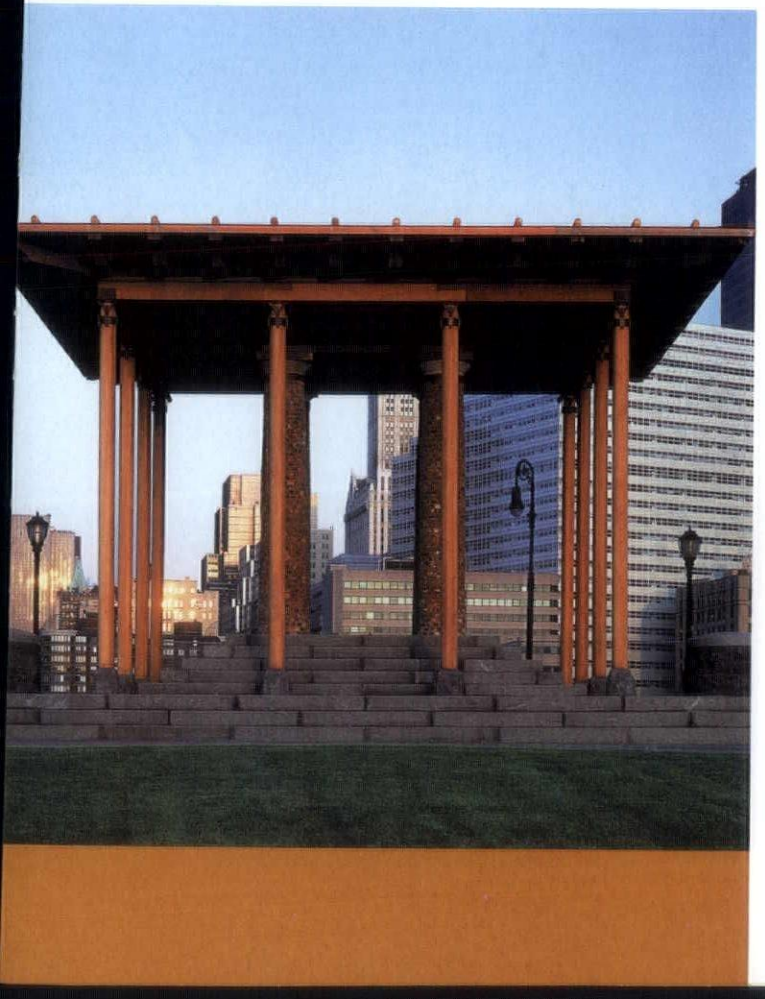


ideas — and you cannot do that only by phone or laptop. You must meet other people, you must have dinner with them, you have to share experiences with them, you have to laugh with them, you have to go to the movies together. Unless the great cities allow those things to happen, we're doomed. Universities are like small cities — they can foster human relationships at a formative period in a person's life. Princeton has an architectural tradition of open courtyards which create intimacy with the landscape and the community. Students live there four years as undergraduates; they should be surrounded by buildings and places which are congenial to peaceful life.

Jeff Stein: What role did Alvar Aalto play in your development?

Demetri Porphyrios: When I was a student at Princeton, there was very little theoretical discussion about construction. I had a neo-Corbusian education, led by Michael Graves and Peter Eisenman in their so-called "white" period. And I was perplexed.

The name of Alvar Aalto was seldom brought up in any discussions, and when it was, it was put under the carpet, so to speak. So I decided to go and meet the man. It was a great experience for me on two counts. Aalto stressed the importance of how you make things, whether handmade or machine-made. He also spoke about a wide range of precedents for his ideas in the design of a building. At Princeton, the only precedents were the Corbusian villas. Otherwise, "precedent" was not a word to be used.



Jeff Stein: Not just at Princeton but anywhere.

Demetri Porphyrios: Discussions on precedent came up almost immediately in our acquaintance. Aalto used to say to me, "Oh, you're Greek, what do you think about such-and-such a temple?" And I knew nothing. I had no clue at all about any classical buildings in Greece. I knew a lot about French classicism because my history tutor had been Tony Vidler, and I knew about the Renaissance chiefly due to David Coffin, my tutor from the art department. But I had never heard anything about classical antiquity. And so it was Aalto who encouraged me to study those buildings. And in that sense he influenced me enormously. If I were to identify the point when my interests moved closer to the European traditional city and to classical architecture, I would have to say it was the time that I spent with him. This is not to say that I am not indebted to my Princeton years; on the contrary, my Princeton years were invaluable. But you know how it is — unless you understand your own culture, you cannot see what it is missing.

Jeff Stein: We should mention that Princeton has at the same time commissioned a building by Frank Gehry. Gehry's Stata Center has just opened here at MIT. Perhaps that means that MIT is only half as brave as Princeton, because Princeton has both Gehry and you working at the same time.

Demetri Porphyrios: Frank is extremely inventive. He has always had a passion for Expressionism. I can appreciate an Expressionist building, but I can't bring myself to actually design one. My passion is rationalism. I've told him that he too is a traditionalist — his Expressionism is part of the Modernist tradition.

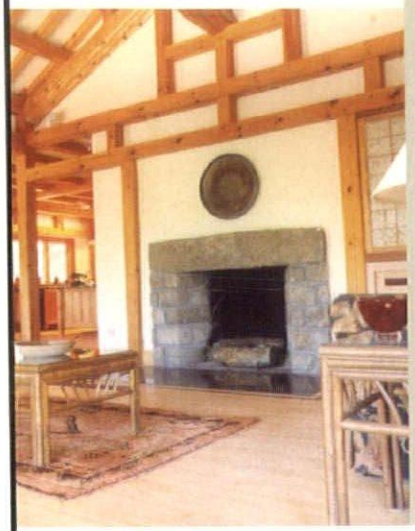
Jeff Stein: Can the Princeton campus accommodate two such distinct visions?

Demetri Porphyrios: I think the world is actually quite large, and there is space for different views. I like jazz, but it is another thing to say that jazz is the only music that should be performed. In a similar way, the fact that I love classical, traditional, rational buildings does not necessarily mean that life should be just that. The world can accommodate many things. ■

For more information: www.porphyrios.com

Left: **Battery Park City Pavilion, New York City**
Opposite: **The Grove Quadrangle, Magdalen College, Oxford University**

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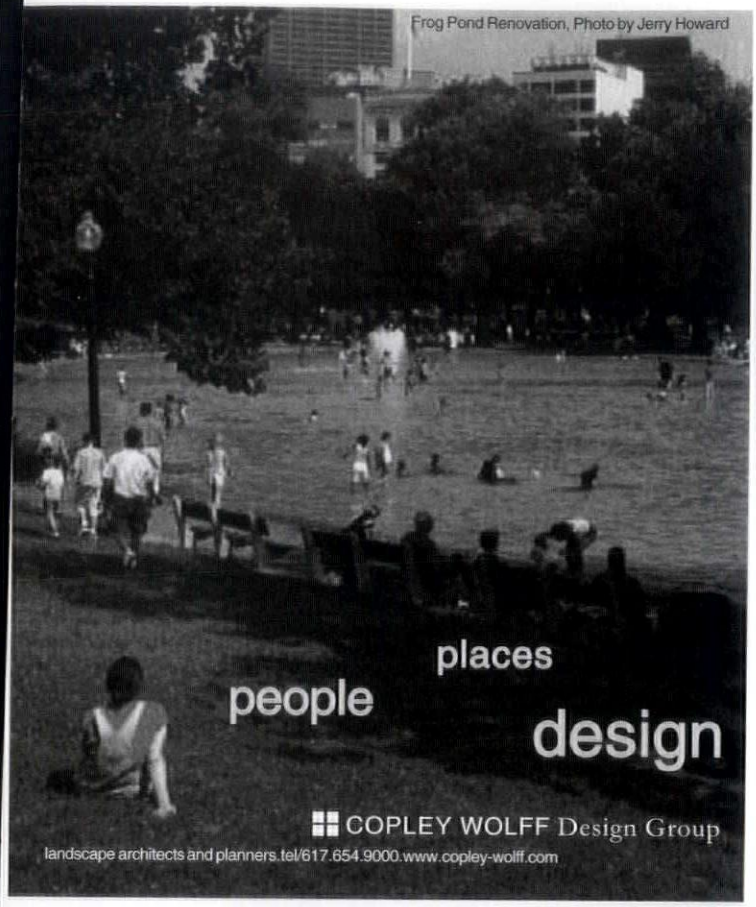
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Rider Hunt employee, 2002

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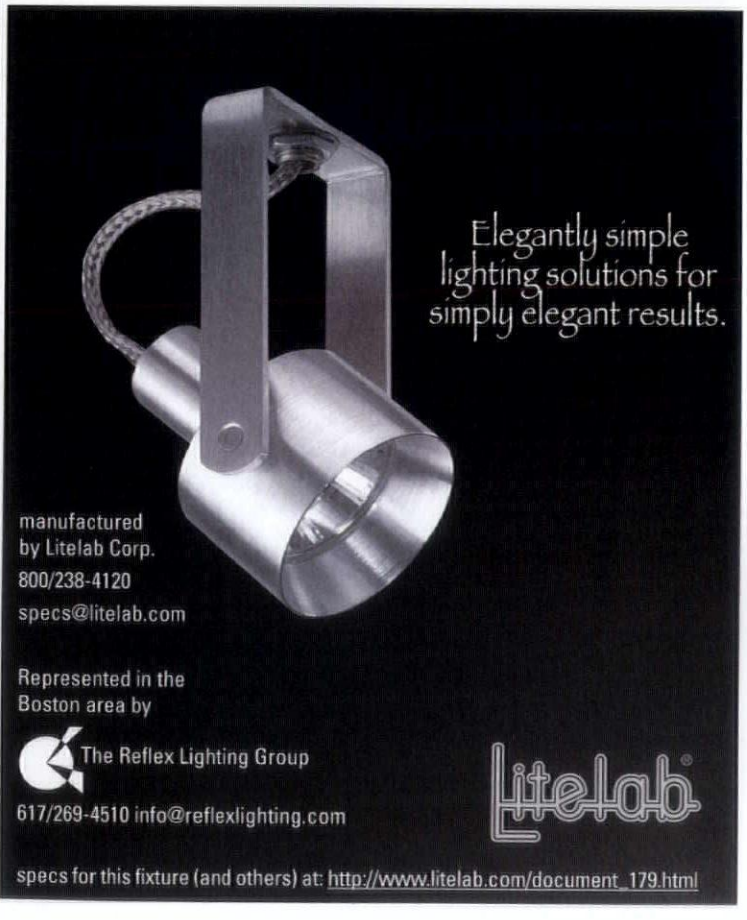
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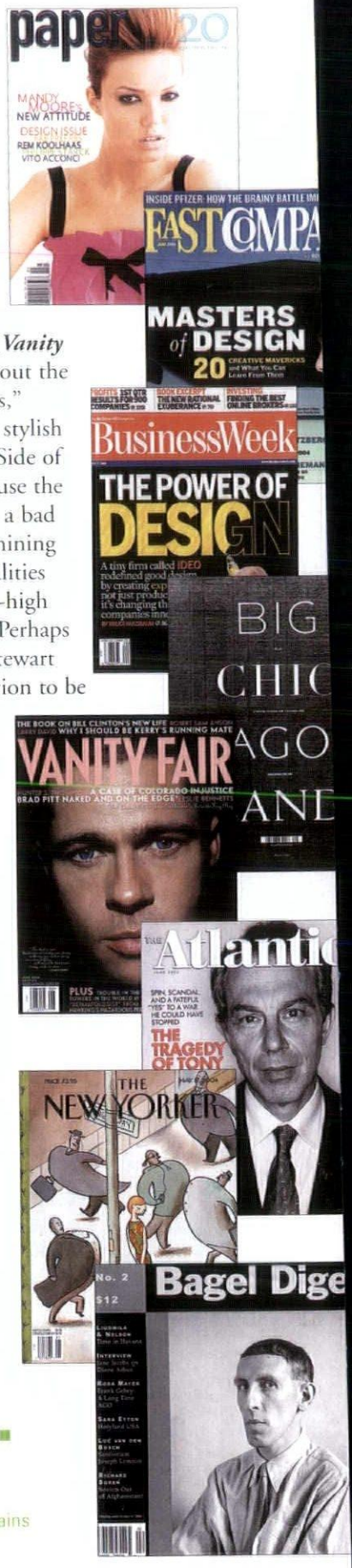
Covering the Issues

Periodical roundup

By Gretchen Schneider, Assoc. AIA

"Design" as noun or verb?... That seems to be the crux of the difference between three recent "design" cover stories. New York lifestyle mag ***Paper***'s "design issue" (May 2004) includes conversations with famous design gurus (artist/architects Rem Koolhaas and Vito Acconici), highlights of trendy prefab housing (mobile homes), and a peek into the private apartments of five current art director/artists to see if how they live compares to what they create. ***Fast Company***'s design issue (June 2004) defines "design" more broadly, attempting to take it beyond the mere look of things. This cover story features 20 design heroes and heroines, both established and up-and-coming, including green architect/thinker William McDonough, author/illustrator David Macaulay, MIT Media Lab professor John Maeda, and architect-turned-mayor Maurice Cox. The editors promise that these "men and women are using design to create not just new products, but new ways of working, leading, and seeing." Finally, ***Business Week***'s cover story on "The Power of Design" (May 17, 2004) spotlights the work of design company IDEO. Once famous primarily for products like the Palm V, Polaroid's I-Zone cameras, and Steelcase's Leap Chair, in this last economic downturn IDEO has retooled itself into a customer-focused service firm that provides the process of design. Sound a lot like what architects do? Well...

More from the Windy City... For a look at Chicago that the AIA 2004 Convention missed, check out ***Big*** magazine (issue no. 49, "Chicagoland"). *Big* is a photography magazine that is really just that; page 163 is the only page of text. Photographer Barbara Crane's stunning photo essay called "We Made our Own Mountains," features façades of skyscrapers both famous and anonymous. She asks her readers to appreciate these "only" as compositions of light, shadow, and texture; the buildings are not identified. Patrick Voigt's views of "The Middle Coast" show people and places along Lake Michigan that are omitted from tour bus tours. And "Sorry Mies" by Darcy Hemley and Andy Gray presents witty pictures of the great master's work. After all, scenes like the aerobics class on the steps of Crown Hall, or the man stacking doughnuts on Federal Plaza are more true to our everyday experiences of these places than the iconic people-less photos of architecture books.



Gossip, backbiting, and celebrities... What more could one want in architectural critique? Alas, lots. "Faulty Towers" (***Vanity Fair***, June 2004), Vicky Ward's tell-all "about the problems behind [Richard] Meier's façades," purports to expose the truth behind these stylish new residence towers on the Lower West Side of Manhattan. Worth mentioning only because the headlines gives architects and architecture a bad name, the story reveals more mundane whining about mismatched paint, difficult personalities on co-op boards, and developers with sky-high promises that haven't quite yet delivered. Perhaps at $2,000/square foot and with Martha Stewart as a neighbor, one might expect construction to be finished when one moves in.

Cambridge-by-the-River?... If it's expensive houses you're after, ***The Atlantic Monthly*** ("Primary Sources," June 2004) reports that the highest concentration in the US is in our own Cambridge, Massachusetts, where "11.6% of all single-family dwellings cost $1 million or more — though $1 million buys only about 1,800 square feet."

She's baaack... Jane Jacobs has a new book out (*Dark Age Ahead*), and her press people are busy. Adam Gopnik interviews the 88-year-old "matchless analyst of all things urban" in ***The New Yorker*** (May 17, 2004), but Jacobs' fans might also want to track down ***Bagel Digest***, a quirky new Toronto-based twice-yearly magazine that seems to chronicle the modern built environment. In *Bagel Digest*, Jacobs recalls a random photo shoot with photographer Diane Arbus, and in doing so recalls the spirit of the Greenwich Village of 1965. ■

Gretchen Schneider, Assoc. AIA, teaches the architecture studios at Smith College and maintains a practice in Boston.

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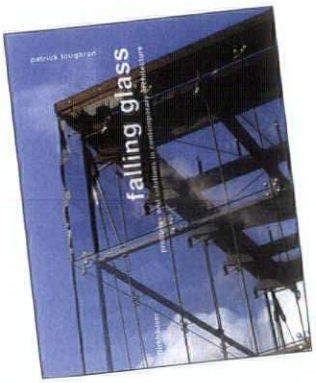
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Books



Falling Glass: Problems and Solutions in Contemporary Architecture

by Patrick Loughran

Birkhauser, 2003

Reviewed by Michael Louis, PE

From the title and cover, the book *Falling Glass* might appear to focus on the problem of glass breakage and catastrophic failure in contemporary architecture. While the book does include case studies of glass failures on prominent buildings, it also has enough broad information on glass technology to serve as a good basic primer on glass and curtain-wall technology and design.

Falling Glass is a well-researched work that presents the material's aesthetic opportunities as well as its technical limitations. The author acknowledges the wide range of uses for glass while remaining mindful of the numerous problems that have resulted throughout history when the physical properties of glass have been pushed to their limits. The book is well organized and written in an engaging and accessible tone and format. Each chapter is followed by summaries labeled "How can [this problem] be avoided?" and "Lessons Learned." These sections are effective references.

The author even devotes an entire chapter to curtain-wall problems and the importance and benefits of pre-construction proof testing for glass enclosure systems. In general, the author's recommendations regarding testing are well-founded. He notes that testing should be used as a tool during the design process either to show that the basic premise of a design is fundamentally sound, or to identify problems with the design and/or constructability of a system before it is assembled on a building. However, the author does not warn the reader that such tests are but a snap-shot in time and as such tend to illustrate best-case performance, before materials such as sealants or gaskets begin to weather, embrittle, and degrade. Thus, these tests do not present an indication of long-term performance, reliability or even serviceability (a common misconception).

My most significant criticism of the author is that occasionally, certain statements and technical recommendations lack one key sentence to finish a thought. For example, the author talks about natural ventilation with double-skin façades stating, "Depending on the envelope's design parameters, a double-skin façade has various methods for controlled ventilation." The reader would benefit considerably if the author would simply list a few methods for ventilating double-skin façades. Conversely, the book includes needless repetition; some passages or entire paragraphs are repeated in separate chapters. The book includes numerous typographical errors and what appear to be incomplete thoughts or incomplete sentences (the editorial equivalent of *Falling Words*?).

Despite these shortcomings, *Falling Glass* is a good primer and a welcome reference source for technical information and glass failure history. However, it is a good book that could have been truly outstanding, with just a little more effort from the author, and a lot more effort from the editor.

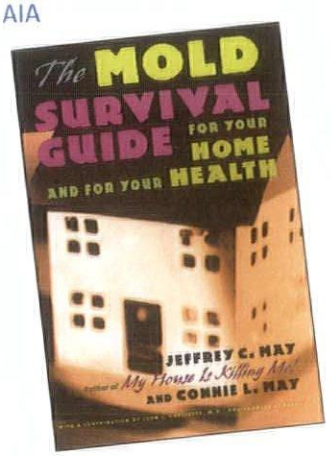
Michael Louis, PE, is an associate at Simpson Gumpertz & Heger in Waltham, Massachusetts, where he specializes in glass, window, and curtain-wall forensics and design.

The Mold Survival Guide: For Your Home and for Your Health

by Jeffrey C. May and Connie L. May

John Hopkins University Press, 2004

Reviewed by Courtney Miller AIA



Yes, my friends, we have trouble, right here in River City. Trouble as in the common, mycotoxin-spewing organism called *Penicillium*. This is just one of four mold varieties including *Aspergillus*, *Cladosporium*, and *Stachybotrys* (the later being the very toxic black mold) that will be rolling off your tongue after you read *The Mold Survival Guide*, a healthy-home/self-help book by Cambridge-based building specialist Jeffrey May and Connie May.

The trouble with mold is not only the perfect storm of litigation sweeping the entire building industry, but also that homeowners made ill by these pesky life forms have fallen easy prey to the mold remediation industry. One homeowner decided to sell his home after a contractor used exterior mildewcide on an interior finished basement floor, thus failing to solve the real problem. Another was duped by a duct-cleaning company that offered a $500 antibacterial solution for mold-infested fiberglass ducts that really needed to be replaced.

The good news is that residential architects who attend programs such as the Energy Star Homes "moisture mitigation" seminars can learn how to prevent this menace in new construction. Many of the Mays' key recommendations follow Energy Star fundamentals: good air sealing in combination with a dedicated ventilation system for high-humidity areas such as bathrooms, kitchens, and laundry rooms; roof overhangs that protect siding from water infiltration; mechanical systems that are installed in conditioned spaces with well-sealed ducts.

Recommended particularly for concerned homeowners and renovation architects, *The Mold Survival Guide* outlines the causes of moisture problems in old and new buildings that haven't had the benefit of all that good preventative medicine. Leading you through his most tried-and-true forensic methodologies, Jeff May gives you the tools to root out the causes of the bedeviling musty odors that have forced homeowners to flee their homes. Perhaps the most useful section describes how to remove these assorted fungi, dead or alive, once the moisture problem has been determined.

Worth noting as well is the "Mold in the Mechanicals" chapter, a quick course on the basics of what can go wrong with poorly installed and maintained forced-air systems. Included in this chapter is one of May's most useful suggestions for the design of AC systems, which he recommends installing as two separate systems, one dedicated to humidification control and the other to temperature control. It's a great solution in New England, allowing the energy misers among us to experience the warm dry heat of the Southwest.

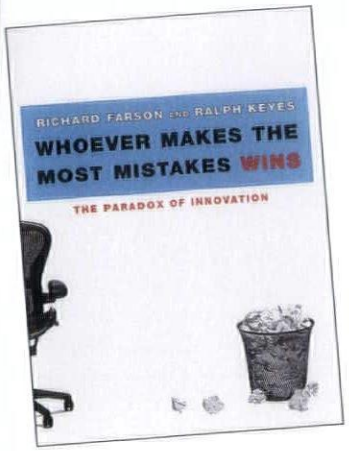
Courtney Miller AIA is the principal of Courtney Miller Architects/New England Solar Homes in Arlington, Massachusetts, specializing in advanced ecological building practices.

Whoever Makes the Most Mistakes Wins: The Paradox of Innovation

by Richard Farson and Ralph Keyes

The Free Press (Simon and Schuster), 2002

Reviewed by Gail Cavanagh



I am a Cubs fan. From the moment I first set foot into the stands at Wrigley Field, I was hooked on the team as well as the game. Yet every season, the devoted city of Chicago hardly dares anticipate that the Cubs will ever make it to the World Series. So why the legendary loyalty?

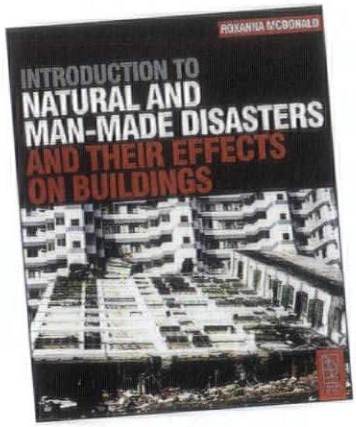
In *Whoever Makes the Most Mistakes Wins* Richard Farson and Ralph Keyes write that our culture's idea of success and failure is an archaic attitude that will inhibit our future economic growth as a nation. The book is peppered with observations on winning and losing from diverse sports idols. The paradox they discuss — that we are happier when striving rather than when crossing the finish line — is best illustrated by a supposed re-write by Vince Lombardi of his own famous quote, "Winning is everything," as "The will to win is everything."

Farson and Keyes' book summarizes the up side of positively analyzing failure to gain a competitive edge in business, while it spotlights the downside of success. Among the case studies of successfully creative corporate environments, 3M is considered to have a very high level of "failure tolerance." Mistakes, and the scientists who make them, are lionized if a failed experiment finds other uses in daily life. Neither Post-It-Notes nor Scotchguard achieved the originally intended goal of the product research.

The glut of sports references used in the book makes the whole argument a little one-sided, but the writers redeem themselves by including an account of Maya Lin's "failure" while a student at Yale where her professor awarded her only a B for her design of the Vietnam War memorial. In an illustration of the failure/success premise of their book, the authors point out that, despite the negative opinion of her academic peer group, the public judged her work to be the most powerfully moving monument ever built and included Lin among the nation's leading designers.

As architects, how can we benefit from this book in a profession that is considered a life-long endeavor of exploration? Farson and Keys suggest that managers can learn to treat success and failure similarly, not with rewards or sanctions, but by defining success as total engagement in one's life and profession. If managers are more personally involved in the design projects they supervise, the staff will thrive in an atmosphere of collaboration. *Whoever Makes the Most Mistakes Wins* is a good, brief read for all time-pressed individuals. It left me with an enthusiastic attitude and two words borrowed from Wrigley Field to describe the work I am doing right now and my future in architecture: Play ball!

Gail Cavanagh is an intern architect at Shepley Bulfinch Richardson and Abbott in Boston. She recently received her Bachelor of Architecture from the Boston Architectural Center.



Introduction to Natural and Man-made Disasters and Their Effects on Buildings

by Roxanna McDonald

Architectural Press (Elsevier), 2003

Reviewed by Charles Harper FAIA

Roxanna McDonald is an architect living in the United Kingdom and working in the European Union with a long list of disaster and preservation work to her credit. Her book lives up to its title: it is indeed an introduction to disasters. Written on an elementary level apparently intended for non-professionals, it describes almost everything destructive that can happen to us, including how, why, and where disasters happen.

Disasters, both natural and man-made, are increasing in frequency. Economic conditions in the developing world cause many of the man-made disasters, while the same conditions cause the poor to live in the areas most often devastated by natural disasters. Mitigation of the inevitable results is critical to the future of all people across the world. As McDonald says, "The need to reverse trends of vulnerability is also highlighted by the fact that the emphasis on disaster response and humanitarian assistance has absorbed significant resources which would have been directed in development and risk reduction." This is the Catch 22 of our disaster-racked world and one of the most important points of the book.

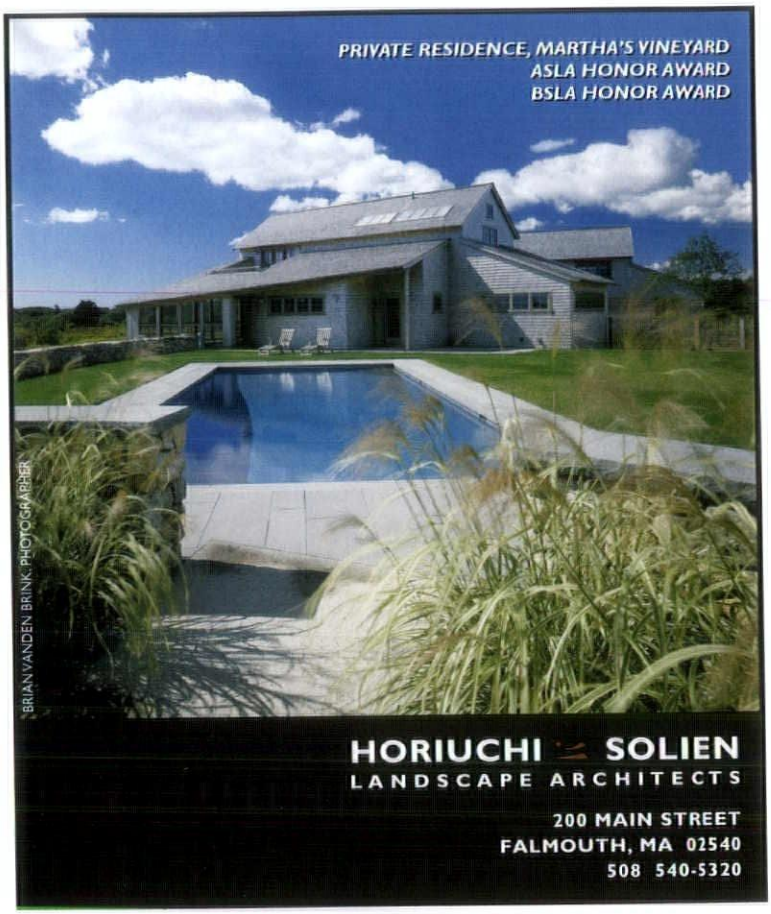
In an easily understood format, McDonald outlines the definition and stages of a disaster, including the response stages. The need to investigate what happened during a disaster is important and must happen if we are to learn how to mitigate the next disaster. (My way of making her point is, "When we build back after a disaster, we are building the next disaster.") She includes several case studies that are very interesting, perhaps the most interesting part to most people. They are highly researched and intended to prove one of the author's main points, which is that we need to work for disaster mitigation because disaster is one of the main causes of poverty in the developing world.

Man-made disasters are much more difficult to deal with. McDonald presents the range of events that can be considered man-made disasters, from local vandalism through 9/11 and all-out war. Although the title indicates that the book addresses the effects of disasters on buildings, architect-readers will probably wish for greater detail on that subject.

The appendices include a compendium of a hundred or so checklists with recommendations for assessing your environment before, during, and after disaster. (If you want to know how to prepare for a nuclear attack, you will find an appropriate checklist here.) These are an important contribution — I have not previously found them all together in any single publication. The appendices also contain an excellent bibliography, which will be helpful to both the serious disaster professional and interested citizen.

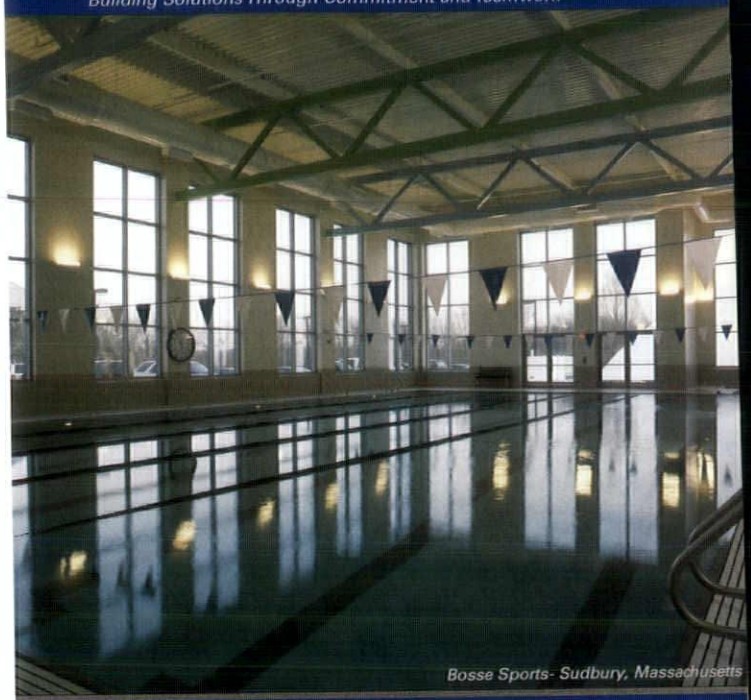
McDonald has written a simple book that offers important advice on how to live in this complicated and sometimes mean world.

Charles Harper FAIA is a founding principal of Harper Perkins Architects in Wichita Falls, Texas, and the former mayor of Wichita Falls. He is the chair of the AIA national Disaster Response Committee and is one of the country's leading experts on disaster recovery.



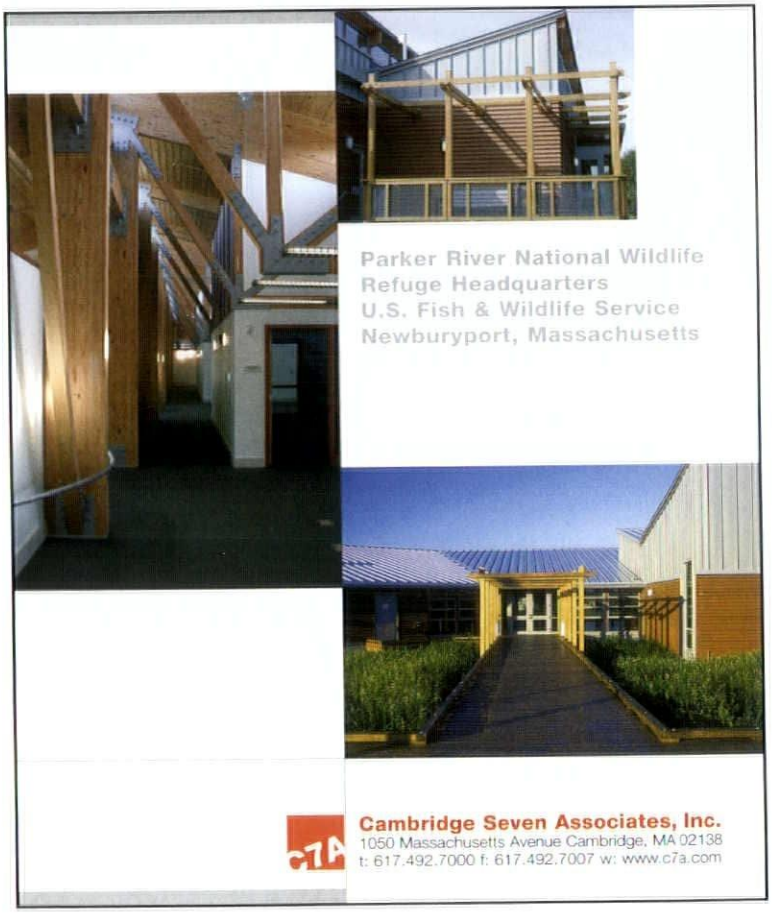
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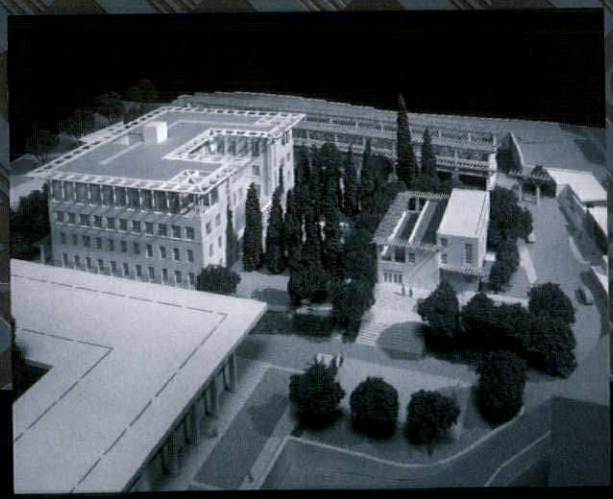
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Websites of note

Environmental Risk Resources Association

www.erraonline.org

You might not be inclined to use "mold" and "terrorism" in the same sentence. But the folks who think about environmental risk management can tell you about finding insurance coverage for both.

Your Disease Risk

www.yourdiseaserisk.harvard.edu

An interactive site that evaluates your health risks and offers suggestions for improvement without frowns, raised eyebrows, or deep sighs.

Harvard Center for Risk Analysis

www.hcra.harvard.edu

More evidence that the School of Public Health is offering some of Harvard's most intriguing initiatives. The HCRA "hopes to empower informed public responses to health, safety, and environmental challenges." Check out the "Risk Quiz" on each page.

Bungee Zone

www.bungeezone.com

Jumping techniques, photos, links, disasters...read it all and one word comes to mind: Why?

The Complete Glossary of Insurance Coverage

www.coverageglossary.com

Click on "glossary" for translations of insurance language into English (with a slight New Jersey accent).

Shaw Guides

www.shawguides.com

Sometimes you've got to take a chance on yourself. The Shaw Guides list "thousands of learning vacation and creative career programs worldwide." As the guys in the fancy sneakers say, "Just do it."

Exploration is Risky Business

www.win.tue.nl/~engels/discovery/death.html

What's risk without failure? Here's a list of explorers who expired in the course of their adventures.

We're always looking for intriguing websites, however inventive the connection to architecture. Send your candidates to: epadjen@architects.org.



Plimoth Plantation

By Joan Wickersham

1. In the gift shop: cranberry tea, cranberry hickory-nut conserve, cranberry pancake mix, cranberry chocolate bars, cranberry jelly beans.

2. Also in the gift shop: shelves of books full of historical information, including the fact that the early settlers had no use whatsoever for cranberries.

3. In the 1627 Pilgrim Village, a meticulously researched re-creation of the early English settlement, you can climb to the second floor of the combination fort/meetinghouse, and look out at the village: a jagged wooden fence enclosing a collection of sagging wooden houses. It's grim, stark, and tiny, at once forbidding and pathetic. This is what the Pilgrims gave up the comforts of England and Holland to come to? This flimsy, ramshackle assemblage of boards and daub is all that stood between them and blizzards, hurricanes, disease, starvation, attacks, and *Lord-of-the-Flies*-style anarchy?

4. Inside the slumping little houses: dirt floors. Ripped oiled paper covering the windows. Darkness, even at midday. Heavy bed curtains, which must have been both necessary and utterly inadequate against the chill of winter nights.

5. Bustling in the houses, hoeing in the vegetable patches, hanging bedding out to air on the fences: staff members, clothed in bright heavy woolens — authentic period dress. But they are not merely costumed guides. They are role-players, deeply familiar with 17th-century history. They have taken on the characters, social positions, and regional accents of various documented English settlers.

6. Along the dusty paths, the role-players scurry, muttering things like: "Yon goats needs must be milked." They really, really seem to believe that it's 1627. The passion with which they adhere to this fiction is so extreme as to be distracting. Um, excuse me, but you do get that this is just pretend, right? The visitor is torn between an impulse to humor them, to protect them from the devastating knowledge of their own delusion, and a weirdly sadistic desire to crack their prithee-come-ye-hither veneer. (A friend of mine who used to work here tells me that visitors were always needling him. "So where's your computer?" they'd ask; and he, indoctrinated never to break character or composure, would answer earnestly, "Yes, we do have a lot of pewter here.")

7. In Hobbamock's Homestead, a re-creation of a Wampanoag summer encampment several hundred yards away from the 1627 Village, a young Native American man is stirring the fire as a spike-haired high school kid in sunglasses says, "Yeah, but what if you don't *feel* like going hunting?"

"I go anyway, because if I don't, my family starves. You do what you have to do."
"*I* don't. I only do what I want to do."
"You have a paper you have to write for school, and you do it, right?"
"Sometimes. Sometimes I don't."
"Well, then maybe you don't really have to do it."
"No, I have to do it. It's the assignment. All I'm saying is: just because I *have* to do it doesn't mean I actually *do* it."
"And I'm saying, if you *don't* do it, then that's proof that you really didn't *have* to do it. I go hunting because I have to," the Native American man repeats.

Is this an encounter between past and present, between two different cultures, or simply between two people who find each other intensely annoying?

8. Walking back along the boardwalk that separates the English settlement from the Native American one: a view out across the bay to a causeway, houses, a motel. None of this modern stuff is visible from the settlements. Suddenly you realize how carefully Plimoth Plantation has been sited to create the fictional impression that you, like the early settlers, are perched on the edge of an unknown continent, in the middle of nowhere.

9. In the middle of nowhere. The woods are full of cawing crows. It's cold. The ocean is big and empty. You don't know if you and your family will survive, let alone prosper. All the earnest dowdiness of this founding-fathers theme park is masking something terrifying. The loneliness and fragility of the settlement, the immense bravery and optimism and stubbornness it must have taken to come and live here. This place isn't about folksy kitsch. It's about radical daring.

10. In the middle of nowhere. ■

Joan Wickersham lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts. She is the author of *The Paper Anniversary* and is finishing a new book.

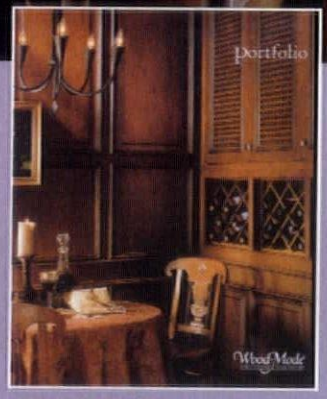


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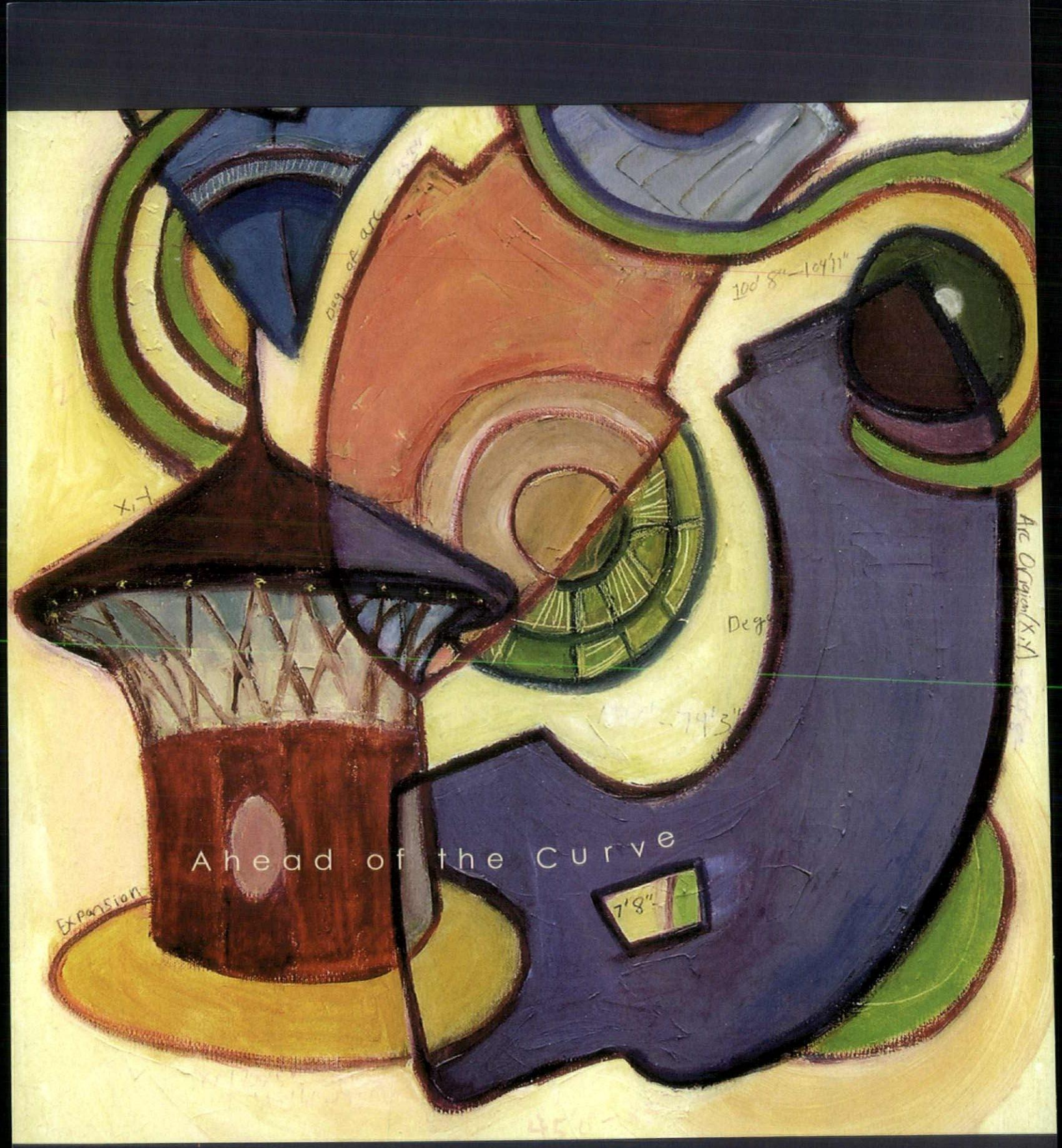
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